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Adventure

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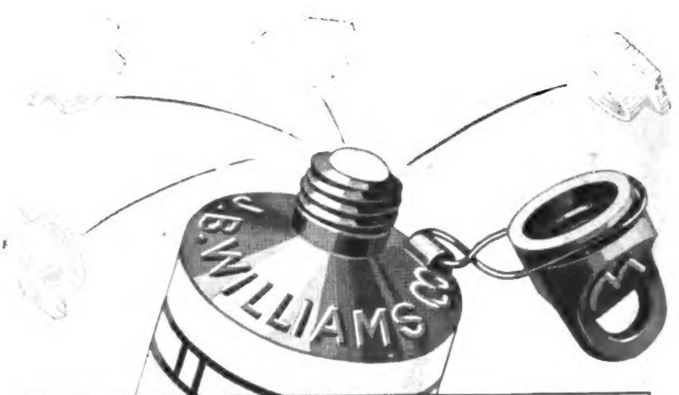

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*Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.

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Cover Design . . . . **A. L. Ripley**

Three Complete Novelettes

INTO the wilderness of North America fled *Olvir Rosta*. But sea and red men were no hindrance to *Swain* in his pursuit for vengeance. "SWAIN'S VENTURE," a complete novelette of vikings, by Arthur D. Howden Smith, in the next issue.

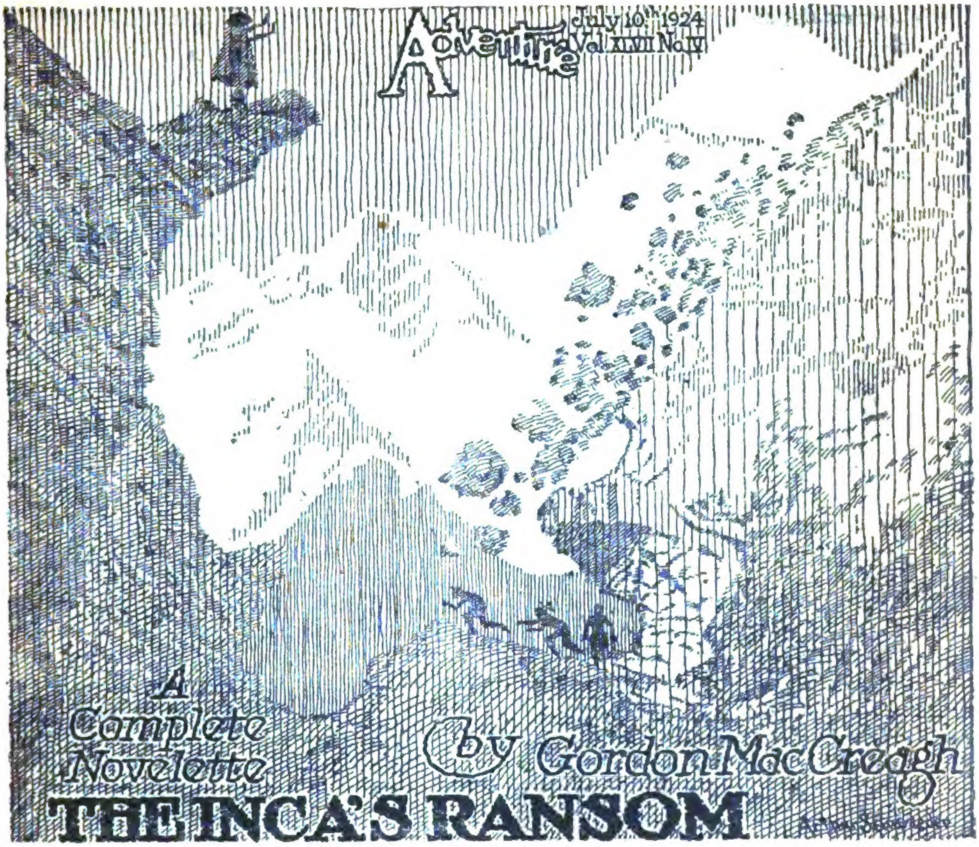
CANTRELL heard strange footsteps all night long, and he didn't trust *Janney—Janney*, who was supplying him with slaves. "GOD OF THE SAKAI," a complete novelette of the South Seas, by Frederick Moore, in the next issue.

"DIAMOND CROSS on the left ribs! Crop the right ear and swaller-fork the left!" Which words led up to considerable excitement on the range. "WORKED BRANDS," by Walter J. Coburn, is a complete novelette in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Adventure **is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**

Adventure July 10th 1924 Vol XLVII No IV



A Complete Novelette

by Gordon MacCreagh

THE INCA'S RANSOM

Author of "Mamu the Soothsayer," "The Fish-Nets of Quoipa-Moiru," etc.

RAIN in ropes, interspersed with sleet in hurricane sheets, smashed down on the high and desolate ravine known as the *Barranca del Brujo*, the Wizard's Gorge.

That great zigzag gash in the mountain flank reared its perpendicular cliffs of cold gray sandstone fourteen thousand feet high in the thin air—which was a good six thousand higher than where vegetation died, and was cold enough to feel like the very top of the bleak world. Yet it was dwarfed by the towering mass of the great ghost mountain which loomed blurry and white and vast over its twisted head.

Chocque Chullunkaya, the Indians called it. The Golden Snow. But why, they could not say. Their fathers had called it so. That was all they knew. Twenty miles distant at least it was from the gloomy gorge; yet it seemed to impend over its very brink, as if hungry to hurl its whole mass bodily into the chasm. The storm found its wild birthplace on the vast white slopes of the place of ghosts; and as it sprang shrieking from its caves and crevasses it lifted the snow in great blankets and whirled them down to plaster them like paste against the upper face of the great spur that thrust itself in a thin wedge into the landscape.

Like a letter V it was, thin and steep and towering. At its far foot, much too tumultuous to freeze, the mountain torrent ran that had cut the gorge in the early beginning of things. Five miles along the northwest face it raced to double round the sharp, unyielding nose of the wedge and go roaring and leaping almost five miles back on the lower side before it settled down to a more orderly onslaught on the spur of Sachsahuaman and the valley of Villcamayu, where the massive masonry of the ancient Inca city of Cuzco still defies the elements, as intact as the day it was raised—which distant day no man knows.

"The Inca's Ransom," copyright, 1924, by Gordon MacCreagh.

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High up on the sharp edge of this great V a jutting excrescence impended hungrily over the gorge; an outcrop of pink and pale-green dolomite which had withstood the erosion of the years and hung now exposed and threatening over the torrent. On its flat top, worn smooth by the treading of ages, scoured clean by the lashing rain and swept smooth of snow by the fierce wind, a tiny crimson tent clung. Not more than three feet high at best, and perhaps two and a half feet across its irregular base. Just such a conical mound as might be made by draping a crouching figure with a red blanket.

At long intervals the thing moved; shifted position stiffly; and then for a long interval again remained motionless. The wind tore at the crimson covering and hurled its sleet against it like shot, molding the weather side to a stiff cast over a skeleton frame. But the ragged cone clung as a limpet clings, apparently by suction. Till at last the storm devils withdrew in disgust and retired temporarily for a rest; and then the thing moved again.

A slit in its top opened, and there protruded from it a head. A skull rather, with ancient parchment stretched over its bones. Parchment that was old and brown and bald and cracked in a thousand furrows. Over the bridge of the great eagle nose and the sharp angles of the high cheek-bones it looked as if the bone were surely about to break through; and the tight-drawn slit of the lips gave no indication that they could ever open and permit speech to issue forth. A dried trophy that might have been in the collection of some head-hunter.

But the eyes! Deep-sunken, of course, in their withered sockets, and shaded like windows under low-hanging eaves of osseous bald brows. Yet like windows lighted from within; extraordinarily bright and piercing and alert. Eyes uncannily young in that withered skull.

Like an aged tortoise the head protruded from its covering and craned a lean neck to gaze unwinking into the teeth of the storm. Then it nodded slowly and withdrew itself once more to wait.

This was Winter's last raging effort; and in some queer way the wizard of the gorge knew it. By intuition or by second sight or by faith—or perhaps by that same instinct that tells a turtle or a ground-hog that Spring has arrived—he knew that the sun, whose hereditary priest and servant he was, would that day shine upon him after an absence behind the mists of five clammy months.

Rain or sleet or snow made no difference to him. He had been born in a lofty hut on the mountain scarp where the snow whirled in under the eaves and salted his mother's blanket with a fine white powder. Of his fathers and of their fathers none that he knew even a legend of had ever descended below the ten-thousand-foot levels. Tremendous lungs and immunity to cold, therefore, were his heritage almost as much as the half-forgotten lore of the ancient priesthood. So with amazing hardihood and sublime faith he waited.

And since faith can move mountains, the storm presently exhausted its rage and passed. The snow devils retreated sullenly to their caves. The rain and the sleet spat their final fury as warmer air, rising from the vast plains beyond the Cordillera, whipped over the snow peaks and scattered the concentrated moisture. The heavy clouds first thinned; then were rent in ragged sheets which raced off down the valley; and presently the sun streaked through and a little later found a wide blue patch and sent a long, watery ray to find the outpost rock where his servant waited.

Incredibly old though he was, the priest sprang to his feet with almost the alacrity of a youth. He threw the faded crimson poncho from him and stood naked in the thin beam. Lean and withered and stringy; yet erect as on that distant day when he was first initiated. He threw his long arms out to his god and stared him unwinking in the face as he chanted the greeting:

"*Illappa. Inti, Ccama arajpacha. Achachi-pa iampatinya.* Lord Sun, Light of the Heavens! Thine ancient servant gives thee adoration. Thy servant calls upon thee—" and so on in a long, quavering chant which came to an end with the indomitable promise of service to come:

"Thy servant makes oath before thee to protect the sacred trust. To find the accursed writing of the treasure that must never come to light. Thine ancient servant swears. Help thy servant, Lord Sun."

It was a prayer and an oath such as any young man in the full pride of his youth might have made. But the ancient priest was the last of his kind. All the others had gone before him. The sacred stock had run dry. There was no stout son to take up the trust. Gone were his people from the face of the earth. Of the *Incasyocca* remained only a not very authentic history and some broken shards—and the wisdom of his fathers which had come down to him. Yet the sacred trust *must* be guarded inviolate.

THIS trust was the ever-recurring story of Inca treasure. All the world knows that the priests of the Inca, when they found that they were helpless to defend themselves against the ravening gold-lust of the white conquerors, buried or cast into their sacred lakes vast treasures of the metal that attracted these ruthless strangers to their land.

Half the adventurers of the world have believed that legends of the casting have persisted through the years among Indians and witch-doctors and half-breed descendants of the conquerors, and have hoped some day to trace the forgotten clues to some of the lost hoards.

The fate of some of them has been to try. Some have been bold enough to go out on a lone prospect, following the trail of a rumor. Some have been lucky enough to get possession of a tattered chart left by some other earlier adventurer. Some have been wealthy enough to organize an expensive expedition. Some have even married squaws and have been taken into Indian families.

And all of them—or very nearly all—have been disappointed. They have hunted and dug and fished; and, while a few have been lucky, the sum total of their findings has amounted to less than a hundredth part of what has been spent in the search.

And why? Because of the sacred trust. The gold was accursed, the ancient priests declared. Because of it their country was laid waste and their people slaughtered by strangers. Therefore was the veil of the *huaca*, the tabu, laid upon it. Never must it be spoken of nor shown. And, though the people of the Inca have vanished and their civilization is little more than a rumor, and their language has utterly disappeared, still the ancient tabu persists.

Those who know—if they know anything—lower their eyes and become wooden-faced and sullen as soon as treasure is mentioned. The curse of the tabu holds even among the descendants of the peoples who used to be the Inca's slaves. There have been adventurers of many nations who have met Indians who, they were convinced, knew. They have bribed them; they have married them; they have even tortured them as the first conquerors did. But no Indian has ever told.

All that has ever been found has come from the stories and desultory records that have been handed down through the descendants of the *conquistadors*.

AS HAD happened to the old wizard of the gorge. In the lake that the mountain torrent formed far below his outpost rock a great treasure had been sunken; a hundred llamas loaded with gold. In some manner a rumor of the sinking had come to one of Pizarro's adventurers, whose memoirs had come through devious handing-downs to a half-breed descendant who, during the last Fall, had arrived with assistants and with equipment to drain the sacred lake and redeem the gold that was accursed, *huaca* forever.

Him the ancient priest had sacrificed to the sun god. But the document, the knowledge of the secret, remained. As long as that knowledge existed the secret was in imminent danger. Therefore must the knowledge be rooted out and destroyed forever.

Then the Winter had shut down on the scene with the suddenness of the first Andean snowfall and had imprisoned the guardian of the gorge in his cave for four long months. Like an aged turtle he had returned within its depths and had subsisted on his store of broad beans and frozen potatoes, isolated from all humanity and buoyed up by his indomitable resolve to find and destroy the last shred of evidence that threatened his sacred trust before he should go to join his fathers. And now he was making oath before his god to take up the search as soon as the trails should be passable.

In Cuzco, the new city that had sprung up under the shadow of the ancient Inca capital, the half-breed descendant of the old Spanish swashbuckler had lived. That was all that the wizard knew. In Cuzco, then, among some thirty thousand inhabitants the accursed document must be sought.

Rather a hopeless task, it would seem, for an old man, feeble and illiterate and alone—and above all an Indian, a person to be spurned and thrust aside. Yet for the old wizard not quite so hopeless as it might seem. His method was strikingly simple and direct.

With the perfection of faith he prayed to his god to clear the trails with speed; and the god heard him and shone with all the sudden ardor of the Andean Spring. Within a few days the tortuous goat track that had once been a well-kept Inca road, and which passed the very front door of the ancient cave of mysteries, was clear of snow. Clear enough for the old wizard at any rate, to whom snow meant nothing. He scrambled along the sheer mountainside with an astonishing agility and with an uncanny memory for crumbly places now covered with the treacherous honeycomb slush of Spring.

Cuzco city lay twenty miles away at the head of its historic valley of Villcamayu. Yet in some wonderful manner the old man arrived there. With his bowl-shaped felt hat and his patchy crimson poncho and baggy llama-wool pants and grass sandals he looked just like any other old Aymara Indian shuffling about the market-place.

There were white men and *mestizos* who would have given large sums of money to know that they were looking at one of the last of the priests of the sun; for persistent legend had it that secrets of vast treasures had been handed down from father to son along the sacred line. But nobody paid any attention to the old man. So decrepit did he appear even that nobody kicked him roughly out of his way.

The wizard came to a halt before one of a row of women who sat behind brilliantly colored blankets spread upon the bare cobbles of the market-place, upon which were displayed little piles of garden truck, potatoes and *okka* and *quinoa* and *chuno*. The woman looked at him once and then hastily made up a package of coca-leaves, which she thrust into his hand.

"*Auquiha*," she muttered. "That my father cast the eye upon my poor produce."

The wizard extended a shrunken claw from under his poncho and held it a moment, palm down, over the blanket. After that a clamor ran all down the line, begging the old man to receive their gifts. He passed along the row of blankets, and what he needed for his sustenance he accepted and gave a brief flash of his hand in return.

A young priest of the Franciscans, assistant to the good father whose perquisite it was to bless the stalls of the market with a dash of holy water and to receive therefor the customary dole, asked indignantly of his Indian servant who carried his bag who might that old man be over whom the people made such a fuss.

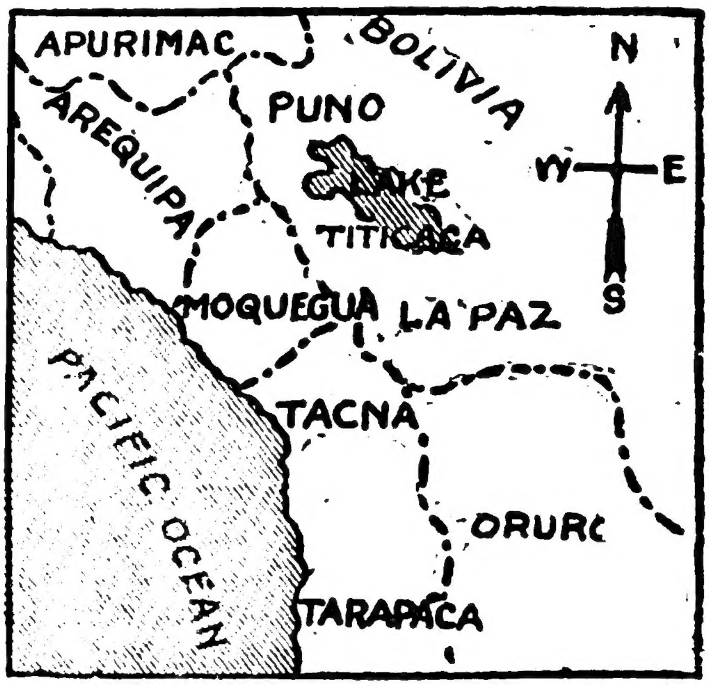
The Indian immediately became a bovine incarnation of dulness and said that he did not know. How should he know? It was doubtless some begger to whom the women gave charity.

Yet a little while later, to another Indian, a youth who asked him the same question, he replied:

"That is Mamu the Soothsayer, the wizard of the Chocque Chullunkaya. Go, boy, and stand in his path and hope that he may look favorably upon you."

And the youth said:

"But Mamu the Soothsayer is dead. My father, who is old, told me that no man had looked upon his face since *he* was a youth. Besides, why should I, who have been to the mission school and can read my own name, crave the favor of an old man?"



So the other Indian very naturally cursed him for a pert young know-all and went his way. And the youth, being a youth, with all the curiosity that belonged to his age, went and planted himself in the way of the old man. And the old man, seeing him to be a youth, alert as well as idle, laid his withered claw upon his arm and looked with frightening keenness into his eyes from under his bald bony brows and said:

"Son, I am old and feeble; alas, very feeble. It is necessary, therefore, that you find out for me the house of one Diego de Soto, who went not so long ago into the mountains and never came back. I wait yonder in the sun. Go, and return with speed."

So the boy, who would rather have loafed the pleasant morning away in the market-place, went to inquire about the de Soto who had disappeared, and grumbled at himself for going. Still, he went.

So the whole day passed. The wizard withdrew himself into his poncho tent and waited, crouched unnoticed under the blue-and-pink tiled wall of the house of Natalia de la Vieja, the *chola* woman who had made her fortune through selling German anilin dyes to those who wove blankets and ponchos. His knees drawn up to his chin, and the little mound of faded crimson poncho crowned by a shapeless felt hat, he was just an old Indian asleep in the sun.

Evening came, but no youth. Still the wizard sat motionless—waiting. Time meant less to him even than to the elements. Darkness came, and still he waited, unruffled, confident that his behest was being carried out. Then at last came a man who made obeisance.

"*Auquiha yatina*, Father of Knowledge," he said. "My son still seeks, having gathered the help of his friends. Through the night they will seek. Let the wise one come to my poor house and rest."

So the old man went with him and huddled in a corner of the hut, silent and mysterious—and waited. Throughout that night and the next day and the next night, wrapped in the mantle of his concentration. In the following morning the boy came. He was drawn-looking and weary.

"My father," he reported, "the man who was Diego de Soto lived in the street called del Coronel, in the third house from the end. There live now his woman and his mother and his woman's brother with his woman and eight children."

Mamu the Soothsayer half-lifted his head from his knees, so that just the piercing eyes gleamed over the poncho's edge.

"Good," he said. "It is now necessary to bring me a servant of that house."

The youth looked askance, and then mutinous.

"But, my father—" he began.

The wizard interrupted him.

"Go," he said.

So the youth went. And presently there came an Indian, wondering and sullen, who said that he was a servant in the house of Diego.

Once again the old wizard half-raised his head.

"It is necessary that we be alone," he said.

Without argument the owner of the hut arose, and his woman gathered up her two children and the inevitable blanket bundle of odds and ends which always lay ready to hand; and they went out and left the wizard alone with the servant of the house of Diego.

Without preliminary or explanation the wizard proceeded to give his inexorable orders about the "writing upon parchment" which must be found—somehow, some way—and delivered to him.

The servant began to raise the first of a hundred objections. But the wizard said simply:

"I wait here. It is necessary that you use speed."

The servant became aware of just two eyes boring into his soul from the dark space between the brim of the felt hat and the drawn-up knees under the poncho. So he went.

It was evening again when he returned with the information that there had indeed been a writing upon parchment, but that the Diego who had disappeared had taken it with him to show to a white man who was going to make his fortune for him; and neither Diego nor the writing had been seen since.

Old Mamu the Soothsayer squatted silent and motionless for an hour while the servant squirmed in uneasiness before him. Then he lifted his head and made a prophecy.

"It will happen," he spoke out of his wisdom, "that that white man will come again. Perchance soon; perchance not for many years. Perchance alone; perchance with others. It is not known to me at this speaking. But surely will he come; and he will seek servants and men with mules to go with him to the *Barranca del Brujo*. When that day comes let word be brought to me with speed."

Then he rose for the first time in three days from his corner and wrapped his poncho about his aged limbs and went from that place. He had reached a point where he was helpless. It was necessary now to make a big magic and to cast the omens and to pray to his Lord Sun for guidance against that coming.

For he was shrewd psychologist enough to know that, if that document about treasure still existed, there was no power on earth which could keep some hardy white man or other from reading therein the call of the Red Gods and embarking upon so joyous venture.

* * *

AS A matter of fact the white man was at that moment in far-away New York, engaged in that heartbreaking preliminary which faces all would-be adventurers—the raising of the necessary capital. He sat in the library of a coldly cautious coffee king, revising in his mind all the arguments which he would put forth to meet the objections that successful business men always produce against all joyous ventures that can not be reckoned at a safe six or ten or fifteen per cent.

Some of the arguments he had ready to hand. He had learned them by experience; for he had been to other successful business men before, and he had learned that business minds all ran in the same groove.

Whatever had not been done by somebody else before and proved to be profitable was to be regarded with disfavor. Until there came the thousandth man with vision, having also knowledge enough about matters outside of his own direct business to see the possibilities and take a chance. After which the rest of the herd would follow madly in the successful one's wake and try, by using all the tricks known to their craft, to catch up with the far-sighted leader.

In this case he had progessed beyond the first, most difficult, barrier. His experience had taught him the necessity of starting with a dramatic story to capture his prospective "angel's" interest; and he had learned well enough to succeed during a previous interview in interesting this financeer to listen to his proposition.

He had survived the period of fretful waiting while the cold man of money was "thinking it over"—which meant that the man had shown the proposition to some of his friends to pick holes in. Now at last had arrived the second interview.

The white man was hopeful—he had at least hooked his big fish. Remained to play him.

"Well, Mr. Templar," said the big man genially, "I've had your document verified, and I'm assured it checks up with what you say. I believe it to be genuine. But it is more than vague about the position of the lake. Now go ahead and convince me, if you can, that you know where the lake is, and that the gold was actually dumped into it."

Templar was ready and full of the enthusiasm of youth. He ran his fingers through his tousled, mud-colored hair for inspiration.

"All right, Mr. King, I'll spill the yarn; and I want you to try and keep in your mind that this isn't any fool pirate-treasure story. You're satisfied that the parchment is genuine. Good. You'll admit then that it's reasonable to believe that it should have come down in the family till this Diego man had sense enough to read it?"

Mr. King nodded; but was ready with his objection.

"I hope *you*'ll admit, young man, that it's reasonable to ask, why didn't anybody else read it during all those years and go after the boodle?"

"Surely. I'll admit they must have. But what would they know about the location of a nameless ravine and a little mountain lake? It was all too vague to do anything with—and they were all *mañana* folk.

"Now this Diego was a breed. Half-Indian. From that side of it he knew that there was this mysterious gorge with a tabu on it and that an old witch-doctor lived there who made magic with fiends and kept the other Indians scared stiff of the place. So he had sense enough to connect two and two."

"All right. I'll consider the point made," said Mr. King with a legal reserve. "But what evidence have you that it was the right place?"

"Well, gee whiz—" the young man ran his fingers through his hair again— "I told you before. This Diego man got in touch with an American who was down there for some reason—a couple of jumps ahead of the sheriff, I imagine—and he put up some money and hired me as engineer, and we went right there and saw for ourselves."

"Ah!" Mr. King was alert. "But what makes you think that the gold was there?"

He leaned back in his heavily padded chair and lighted a cigar with a smile indicative of having put a poser.

The young man grinned cheerfully back at him and took a long breath for his final assault.

"I've got nothing but my word for the rest, Mr. King. You can check up on all the foregoing at no very great expense by just sending your own representative with me, just as though I came to you with samples of a mine. But I hope to convince you that I'm not lying."

Mr. King just nodded for him to proceed.

"Well, lemme describe the locale, first. There's the big deep ravine; shaped like a V, it is. Melting snow from the mountain up at its head forms the little river, which in turn forms little lakes as it descends. Now there's a great wedge of a cliff of metamorphose sandstone, a quartzite formation, harder than the rest, which made the stream cut round it and form the V. 'Way up on the cliff is the old witch-doctor's lookout station, a dolomite outcrop. Back of that again, sheer along the cliff face, is an old Inca road, and back of that again is the cave in which the old man lives."

Mr. King was leaning forward in his chair again, watching the young engineer's face with the interest of a hawk. Templar saw that his story held the man, and his heart thumped in his throat almost loudly enough to break the flow of his speech. He swallowed hard to get a hold on himself and continued:

"Now then, here's what happened. I started to cut off the inflow—the lake is right under the old road, you must understand—and to siphon the thing dry. Well, right from the start the old witch-doctor laid himself out to obstruct. He scared off our peons. He busted the flume. He—at least I think he did—he got rid of Diego. Anyway Diego started out to kill the old man, and he never came back."

The financier was gripping the arms of his chair, and his cigar had gone out.

"And then what?" he prompted as Templar paused to marshal his thoughts.

"Well, then—" Templar grinned in rueful reminiscence—"he beat me hands down. He turned an underground river into my lake."

"How d'you know that?" snapped the hard man of business.

"We went up into the cave and saw, that other white man and I. There was an awful chute, wet and slimy and spooky, 'way back in the bowels of the earth. The old witch-doctor was there, putting a spell on us or something; and, by golly, I believe it worked. Anyway the other man made a grab for him and slipped, and slithered into the mill-race, and in a second he was gone. In one swoop down that smooth, oily chute into the black bottom of nowhere. Then—then I got scared and ran."

There was a long silence. The cool man of far-sighted affairs slowly relaxed in his chair like a trance medium coming to life. At last, almost in a whisper—

"And then?"

Templar had no skill in spellbinding. But his very lack showed the straightforwardness of his story.

"Well, that was all," he finished lamely. "But that's how nobody else knows about the thing now but me. And that's why I believe—I mean, on account of the old wizard's determination to stop us—that the story in the parchment is true. I believe there *was* a huge load of gold coming along the road to pay the ransom of the Inca when Pizarro murdered him. And I believe that the priests dumped it right there. And I *know* that I can get it; 'cause now I know how I was beaten last time. There's no trick to cutting off the water supply, and then I can guarantee to drain the lake in a month."

Mr. King lighted himself another cigar. He had still an objection to make; one which seemed serious enough to wreck the whole project; and he was businesslikely brutal about its expression.

"Well, young man, I'm inclined to believe what you tell me. I don't think you could invent all that description; and your story sounds good enough to gamble on. *But*—from what you tell me, that gorge you speak of must be one —— of a nasty place, and I'm too old to go gallivanting about over the top of the earth on a wild treasure hunt. So if I grubstake you, as you call it, how am I to know that you won't just up and skip with the expense money?"

Templar was not hurt, or even offended—he had been meeting these men for several months. His answer was ready.

"Good enough, Mr. King. Your objection is sound, but not insurmountable. I come to you as a mining man. Now suppose this was a mine and I went to any promoter with samples. In the regular course of procedure he'd send his own representative with me to handle the funds. Half the mines in history have been opened up that way.

"Well, you can do the same thing. Don't give me any money. Send your own man along with me—anybody you want to trust. Let him hand me the expenses as they're needed."

The financier smoked furiously for some seconds. He could see no flaw in that proposal. Then he announced his decision—this one *did* have the faculty of making up his mind without calling a meeting of trustees and directors.

"Young man, you've sold me on that last. That sounds fair enough for anybody—provided my man can keep his end up once you've got him out there alone. But let that go for the present. Now tell me. How much will it cost? And how much do you expect for your end?"

Templar with difficulty restrained himself from grabbing his hat and throwing it up in the air and yelling. Yet in the midst of his exultation he was unable to restrain the reflection that comes to all men who risk their lives in the far corners of the earth in the pursuit of fickle fortune, and then come home to comfortably entrenched capital to look for "front-end money" to exploit their hard-won findings.

"Oh, I know the rules. Grubstake money takes half; and then five or ten per cent. more to hold control. I'm in no position to kick; and I bow before grubstake law. *I* dig up the knowledge. *I* do all the work. *I* take all the risk. *You* gamble about fifteen thousand dollars and take the better end of a split on some few millions profit."

The financier took no pains to restrain a grim smile.

"To him that hath shall be given," he quoted. "But why fifteen thousand?"

Templar was on sure ground here. He gave his details snappily and in short order. He was quoting an estimate for an engineering job now.

"About seven for equipment—that's cheap, 'cause some of my old pipe-line will be lying there and must be usable. Three in reserve in case of accidents; and five for expenses—that item comes heavy 'cause I'll have to take white labor, say four men, 'cause I'll never be able to get Indians to stay on that job.

"And what's more, if you're afraid I'm going to double-cross your man when I've got him out there, let him pick his own crew; friends of his or yours, if you like. They don't have to be horny-handed sons of toil. There's going to be no heavy labor involved in the thing; nothing that I wouldn't do myself. All I need is a little help."

The financier drummed with his fingers on the arm of his chair, reviewing in his mind the scanty list of people he had met during his business career whom he thought he could trust. Then he made his decision with the finality and swiftness which had placed him where he was in the business world.

"All right, young man; I'll play. I'll give you my nephew. A few months away from the bright lights will do the young scoundrel good. He's never done anything but play the ponies and run with a bunch of shady men and fast women. It'll be cheaper for me to send him with you than to pay his phony checks.

"Now, I'm going to be busy, and I won't have the time to go into details of this thing with you. So I'll send my nephew to get in touch with you, and you can make all further arrangements with him. You make out your papers and contracts with him, and he'll report to me whatever may be necessary."

Templar was not enthusiastic over the thought of shepherding a young waster of the bright lights. But no would-be adventurer who needs financing is ever in a position to pick and choose. Templar was glad to accept any terms. Though the sour reflection grew as he went home that there was a fine irony in the fact that this careful man of business was willing to trust a youth whom he himself condemned as a scamp, rather than himself, whose record was one of clean, hard work, simply because the former happened to be a relative. But such is the way of hard-headed men of business.

But for all that as he went down the street with long strides and began to add architectural details to the castles he would build with his half of the treasure, he suddenly did grab his hat and yell as he threw it high in the air.

SO IT came to pass that the wizard's prophecy was presently abundantly verified, to the great wonderment and awe of the peons of Cuzco market-place. There came to him in a great flurry of excitement no less a person than a *cacique*, one who had acquired comparative wealth among his people through the cultivation of coca-leaf. He found the wizard crouched at the entrance of his cave, wrapped in his poncho, head and all withdrawn, as was his wont; a red mound of mystery in the sun, crowned with a battered, bowl-shaped hat. Without movement or inspection the wizard's voice came from beneath the covering.

"Be welcome, Jottua, *cacique* of Songo."

Whereat the *cacique* greatly marveled. How was he to know that the stones he dislodged as he scrambled along the precipitous path echoed like gun-fire back and forth along the top of the gorge and heralded his coming while he was still a mile away, and that the wizard from his vantage-point at the very apex of the V could peer between a split boulder created long ago by his forefathers for that purpose?

"My father," he began to report in an awed voice. "The prophesy is come true."

"I know," said the level voice beneath the poncho. "White men are in Cuzco."

The *cacique* clapped his hand over his mouth.

"Ow," he mumbled. "My father knows all things. It is true. In the *finca* of Gomez they are, seeking mules to carry packs. Five of them. One who speaks Spanish, and four who are drunk."

"I know," repeated the wizard, and sat silent, motionless and mysterious.

It was one of the very first teachings out of the lore of the ancient priests, his forefathers, that a mantle of mystery covered many a period of indecision and thought—which is a much more effective trick of psychology than the custom of many civilized wise men who endeavor to make thinking time under cover of a flood of words. Another gem out of the observation of the ancient soothsayers was that if one sat still long enough the other would eventually speak in the sheer need of breaking the uncomfortable silence and would supply further information which could be preempted as no new thing.

The need with the squirming *cacique* became insistent. He dared to intrude upon the abstruse meditation of the seer with a clumsy offer.

"If my father needs the service of men those of my plantation——"

The seer interrupted him with a hasty negative. Men, open resistance, was the last thing that he desired; for then would the secret of his gorge be advertised to the world. No; he would have to contrive—somehow, someway—to outwit these white men. Five of them, with all modern science at their back. And he, a lone, feeble man with nothing but his native wit and the half-forgotten wisdom of an ancient cult.

Yet the secret of that sacred trust *must* be kept. It was the one dominating force in his life, as it had been in the lives of his grandfathers before him.

In some manner, quietly and without fuss, these white men must be persuaded that they followed a chimera, that there was no treasure—which would be difficult in the face of that accursed parchment. Still, somehow they must be dissuaded. Or if that should prove to be impossible—they must be utterly destroyed.

The old soothsayer made the gesture that signified that his visitor might go—it was evident that no further information was to be had. The *cacique* made obeisance before the huddled mound of mystery and went, unblessed, unthanked; yet satisfied with the importance of a great story to be told in the market-place about the supernatural wisdom of old Mamu the Soothsayer.

When he was alone the old man rose wearily and withdrew into the inner compartment of his cave, the chamber of mysteries where the ancient stone gods lived, and set about casting the omens of the coca-leaves to discover what craft an old and feeble man might devise against these terribly persistent white men whose strength and whose knowledge were so much greater than his own.

FOUR days later the white men arrived in the gorge below. The one who spoke Spanish and the four who were still drunk. With them came a train of mules bearing lengths of pipe and timbers and planking and tools and tents and all the mess of gear that is required for a camp in the wilderness where nothing grows at all.

The one who was sober left them all to their own devices while he jumped eagerly off his saddle mule and strode up the slope to the lip of the silver-surfaced lake in the depths of which lay his hopes.

He stood on the brink and made a quick survey of the scene; and a pleased grin began to chase the lines of harassment from his face. Things had not changed much since he was there last. The gorge was as gloomy and as grim and as desolate as ever.

Nothing other than the elements had endeavored to undo his work.

The flume that he had built to cut off the inflow from above had broken down in a few places, and the water splashed merrily into the lake. It was inconsiderable; yet from the lower end where he stood a small river roared out through the gap that he had blasted. The underground river was still doing business at the old stand. But that caused him no anxiety; he knew where to cut that off now.

His old pipe-line was almost intact. The pump had rusted beyond repair; but he had foreseen that. The proposition on the whole was very favorable. Encouragement, for the time being, took the place of worry, and he stepped down the rubble-strewn slope and set to with a will to direct the disposal of all the gear.

It was not so easy as it might have been. Each of the half-dozen mule-drivers bawled questions at him at once; and since he could not answer them all at the same time, they sat down to take things easy and let the mules wander while one of their number was being shown what to do.

Or when the busy white man yelled at them to get busy themselves and unload certain gear at a certain point, they would catch the wrong mule and deposit its load far from the spot where it was needed. Even in a narrow ravine a perfectly awful amount of labor can be expended in removing sundry mule-loads of tents and things from one place to another place where they should be set up. Templar had made camps often enough to know that he wanted a tent-mule, for instance, unloaded within three feet of the spot where the tent was to be set up; and he sweated in spite of the chill elevation as he wrangled with the mule-men, who were only one degree less stupid than their beasts.

The other four were of no assistance to him whatsoever. True, they could not—with perhaps one exception—make themselves understood to the drivers; but not one of them made the slightest effort to use his two hands and carry a package. For one thing, they were still wandering in the fog resultant upon their celebration of arrival in a country where prohibition was not; and for another, they were too appalled at the desolate prospect before them. They sat about on convenient boulders, washed-out and headachy, and mumbled their feeble disgust to one another while they absorbed consolation from their fat hip flasks.

"Holy gee, what a hole!" they told one another. And, "Sweet poppa, do we gotta live here a coupla months?"

The desolate, forbidding ravine was in point of fact considerably different from the gay street of a million lights which was their ideal of existence.

However, Templar contrived to get all the confusion of gear stowed in due time, and paid off and dismissed the mule-men—who were glad enough to get out of that haunted place. Then he found time at last to stand with his hands deep in his breeches' pockets and feet wide apart and make a wry-faced survey of his crew in the environment in which they were going to work for the next few months. As he looked, the harassment and worry stole back into his face in concentrated form. They were a sorry-looking crew. On the steamer they had seemed not so very inferior to the nondescript gathering that travels on those West Coast boats; but here they surely did not fit.

Not a one of the four showed the slightest promise of being a useful worker. But then, of course, they did not pretend to be. Templar had enlarged upon the fact that no really hard labor would be entailed; and these cronies of the nephew—men whom he could trust—had come along on a treasure-hunting picnic. They argued that they could easily put up with the discomforts of camp for a few months in return for the "share" of the gold which would accrue to them.

There was King, the nephew, who was just about what might have been expected from his uncle's recommendation of him. He was dressed, like all of them, in the prescribed camp costume, in nice new khaki shirt and cord breeches and high-laced boots. But he looked too much like what-the-young-man-will-wear-in-camp-this-Summer. In keeping with his costume was a face equally immaculate, bloodless and weak, physically and morally.

"Hmh! Looks like a darn good dancer," was Templar's comment.

Then there was Babson, a geologist. Tall, slender, and not ill-looking. Nothing actively bad about him. In fact the only visible thing that could be determined against him was that he was King's friend.

The other two were from a different class.

Dockety, big and burly and densely ignorant; though with a certain natural cunning in his little eyes; running a little to stoutness from an easy living which he had not been brought up to. No mean portion of that easy income had been derived from tips on sure-fire winners which he had furnished for the investments of hopeful souls like King's.

Templar wondered how it came about that even a young rake like the financier's nephew could have selected this gross person for a companion. He did not know much about the life of a rake, or he would have guessed the common old story of the race-track man who "had something on the young blood." As a matter of fact, the man held so many notes of the nephew's which the uncle must not know about that he had been able to force his client's hand and insist on being let in on the present gamble for fortune.

Then there was Marty—he had no other name—he was Jim Dockety's tout—and looked it.

A sorry looking crew indeed. Not to be utterly condemned, perhaps, in their proper sphere. But for an engineer with a job requiring manual labor they were distinctly not in the best of form.

Yet Templar—being but a young man with a project which needed finance—had not been in a position to pick and choose. The financier's nephew had the right to select his own men; and he had picked, as had his uncle, people whom he thought he could trust.

Templar's wry smile slowly contracted to one of ruminative worry. He had seen men herded together in close association in camps before. In good camps; and he had seen them go to pieces under the strain. For man, being a gregarious animal, is designed to live together in herds—not isolated by twos and threes together.

This was not going to be a good camp; and he had told them all so before they started. But their conceptions of a camp had been derived from a Saturday afternoon's automobile picnic. Templar looked them over and wondered. Very seriously did he wonder—even about himself.

His face was almost grim as he squared his shoulders and braced himself to face the first unpleasant task. He stood before them on wide-spread legs and delivered the little speech which he had thought over so often as he had seen the necessity grow.

"Well, fellers, we're here. And here we're stuck for a couple of months. Tomorrow I'll tell you how we're going to set about the job. But there's one point I want to make clear right from the start. You fellers loaded up a mule with four cases of hooch to bring out here. Well—that mule didn't come!"

He waited for the outbreak. But the only immediate effect of his announcement was an incredulous dawning of understanding on the fuddled senses of the four.

"That's right, boys," he repeated. "I ordered it. And I'll tell you why. The last time I was here two white men got killed and the whole job flunked just because they kept themselves soused. The old wizard who lives up there isn't any kind of a fool; and he beat me out hands down. This time I'm not taking any chance of being beat."

The sense of what he was saying began to get home. As is the habit of weak men, three of them began to stir up their courage to the pitch of remonstrance by first complaining to each other about this dictator's gall. What did he think he was? Who gave him the authority to pull that line anyhow? etc. The fourth, Dockety, remained silent; but much the more dangerous.

Templar showed a rare discernment in realizing that he must establish his ascendency now or not at all. He raised his voice over the growing clamor, and his jaw began to thrust itself aggressively to the fore.

"One more thing. I know that all of you shoved a couple of quarts apiece into your saddle-bags in case the baggage should be held up. Now I've seen men killed on less than that in a desert camp. And what's more, I want to get down to work *tomorrow*. So I'm going to frisk those bags and bust up the reserve."

This time the three were dumb with indignation. But Dockety rose and stepped not very steadily up to the engineer.

"See here, sport," he growled in a habitually husky voice. "Lemme tell yuh 't you've got one——of a noive. Who the blasted——made *you* a boss around here? Now I'm tellin' yuh there ain't no —— ——white-collar engineer goin 'to take no quart outa my bags. So whadda ya goin' ter do about it?"

He teetered back and forth as he threatened with the portentous ferocity of his kind and present condition. Templar knew enough to exercise restraint.

"Don't be a —— fool, Dockety," he said. "I'm going to do it; and I'm going to do it right now; and you're too drunk to put up a scrap about it. You've got too much of a load even to follow me up to where the bags are. So quit."

The cliff wall came down sheer to the ravine bottom on the side below the wizard's rock. But on the other side was a steep slope strewn with rubble and loose boulders. The tents had been pitched on a more or less flat ledge at the head of this, close up against the opposing cliff, as a natural protection against possible flood. It was quite an awkward climb at any time.

Templar scrambled up, and Dockety started to follow him, bent on rescue at any price. But it was true. He *was* too drunk. He succeeded only in slipping and floundering about at the bottom of the slope in a series of self-created avalanches, where the other three were able to join him and help to voice the loud indignation while their self-established chief methodically ransacked their saddle-bags and smashed one after another of their precious store.

He completed the sacrifice to efficiency and stood once again wide astraddle to look down on them.

"Don't get sore about this, fellers," he urged. "You'll think differently tomorrow. Now I'm going to fix grub for tonight. Tomorrow we'll lay out a schedule. And let me give you a tip. The sun will be gone in an hour from now; and, believe me, it'll get so suddenly cold that you'll want your tents and blankets. So the tip is to lay off those hip flasks so you'll be sober enough by that time to get up here."

But they only clamored in impotent rage and mouthed curses at him.

A poor beginning for a long and dreary job.

AND Mamu the Soothsayer, flattened out on his rock high above them like a lizard, watched these things with the keenness of the great condors that circled with endless monotony high above him. And the thousand furrows of his dried-out parchment face agitated themselves; and, as he watched, they deepened; and as he watched more, they cracked; and finally spread ever so slightly; till it might almost have been said that the wizard smiled.

For full half an hour the expression remained set, almost as if the withered parchment had no resiliency of recovery in it; and at intervals he nodded, stiffly as a lizard nods in the sun. Then the sinking orb slanted coldly over the saddle-back crest of the mountain of the Golden Snow and threw the shadow of it on a deep groove carved in the hard dolomite just before his face. And suddenly, with the miraculous elasticity that his aged joints seemed capable of, he leaped to his feet and flung out his wasted arms to his god in thanksgiving for what he had seen.

"*Illappa, Illappa,*" he called. "*Inti, achachi-pa aruntanva.* Lord Sun! Thine ancient servant greets thee. Thy servant sees the omen of the dissension among the white ones. Great is the Lord Sun. *Illappa. Ccama arajpacha!*"

His thin voice carried down to them on the thin air in broken, fading echoes; and then, just as the last whisper died away, the returning waves thrown from the upper cliffs enveloped them in an eerie wailing of crescendo shrieks till all the rock-bound devils of the bleak ravine howled at them, and presently reluctantly drifted on down the gorge, whispering and whimpering, and threatening to return as some projecting angle caught the sound and flung it back.

When he could make himself heard, Templar called down to the startled four, laughing at the alarm in their faces.

"That's him. That's the old boy himself saying hello to you. Come on up and take a look at him and get introduced. 'Cause you can bet your shirt that you'll see a heap more of him before you're through."

Dockety, the big burly one, shuddered. He was ignorant enough to be densely superstitious and just befuddled enough to be wildly imaginative.

"Gee," he murmured as he looked affrightedly over his shoulders as if expecting to see demoniac faces grinning out at him from every dim crevice of the cliff. "Gee! Ain't that the limit!"

But he was sober enough now to climb the slope to the cheerful shelter of the campfire. And the other three followed him.

THE morning was by all standards of measurement quite the worst cold gray dawn after the night before that any one of the crew had known. The sun shone in a cloudless sky, as it would do for the next few months without a break. But at fourteen thousand feet there is no cheerful warmth to the sun's rays; and it is appalling how cold a tent can be at night—and not one of the four knew how to make the most of blankets in camp.

A very sorry crew indeed they were when Templar woke them—and rewoke them half an hour later; and again an hour after that. In addition to the heads which they had legitimately earned, their limbs ached with the effort of trying to keep warm all through a chilly night.

But the aroma of coffee and bacon acquires a totally new and potent magic at eight A. M. and fourteen thousand feet. They dragged themselves out of their tents—lest these things, as Templar shouted to them, should grow rapidly cold—and gathered round the folding mess-table, a haggard and a very miserable quartet of treasure-hunters.

Templar showed generalship in substantiating his leadership while the others were yet in a chastened mood. While they ate, he laid down the simple rules of camp.

"Listen, fellows, and you can get some cheer out of this. I've looked over things, and I can tell you right away that there's not nearly so much of a job as I had expected. Quite most of my former work stands good. All it needs is a little repair.

"We've first got to cut off the intake. There's a half a week's work fixing up that old flume that you see there; and then there's an underground feed which we must dam off above. I'll tell you about that presently. When that's done, all we'll have to do will be to sit by and watch her siphon."

"What's siphon?" grunted Docket sulkily. "Thought it was a soda-water bottle."

Templar had to think a while in order to translate his explanation into words suitable for an intelligence quotient of twelve.

"Siphon means that that pipe-line thing you see running all the way down the valley goes up over the lip of the lake and forty feet under surface—I laid it myself and I know. Well, when we've put in a couple of new lengths here and there and rigged a pump to start suction it'll keep on going of itself due to atmospheric pressure."

Dockety was intrigued, though skeptical.

"D'ya mean," he asked obtusely, "that we don't gotta keep on pumping, an' the water'll just crawl up the pipe an' keep on goin'?"

"Exactly that," said Templar as patiently as might a teacher to a backward child. "It'll keep on going at about five thousand gallons per minute; and all you'll have to do will be sit by and see that nobody comes along and gums the works."

"Chee! An' then we gets the boodle?" piped up Marty.

"Not yet. The lake is more than forty feet deep. When it empties that far we'll have to join on another length of pipe. Two more lengths ought to do it."

Even the tipster's tout had vision. He could picture to himself a lake bottom paved with gold.

"Chee!" he murmured again. "An then we kin go in an' scoop it up?"

Templar was not cut out for a teacher; he was a doer. He was getting weary of lecturing in this kindergarten language. He took a long breath.

"No, not yet," he explained. "The gold will have been covered over with a certain amount of sludge deposit. We'll have to dig a little soft dirt. I don't imagine there'll be any need to screen it, because all this Inca gold was in ingots. But what I want you fellows to understand is that there's no real hard work to tackle; mostly waiting and keeping watch."

"Huh, suits me," growled Dockety, whose resentment about yesterday's affair was beginning to reassert itself as his vitality revived under the stimulus of the coffee and bacon cooked by Templar while he slept. "Suits me; 'cause I ain't figurin' on doin' no labor."

"Not a stroke more than your share," said Templar quietly.

Dockety pushed back his chair threateningly and half-rose, employing the age-old bluff of the lower grades of intelligence, indicated by ferocious demeanor accompanied by loud tone of voice.

"Not a stroke more'n I want, Mr. White-Collar Engineer; an' I don't see nothin' in sight to make me, neither."

He seemed to be imbued to an unusual extent with that resentment against all persons of a more refined station in life which marks many of his kind. Templar was unable to keep the innuendo out of his voice.

"I wonder what gentleman mishandled you at some time?" he asked.

The point was utterly lost on the man. But he bellowed a loud denial of ever having been mishandled by anybody, and added emphasis by leaning over the table and glowering down at Templar, who sat quite still with both hands in full view. It was, according to the bully's experience, the next move in the purely animal instinct of intimidation.

At this juncture his employer and his employer's friend rose to avert what impressed them as the impending slaughter of their only engineer. But the burly tipster was enjoying the full flush of confidence in the success of his bluff. He threw the restraining arms from him and enlarged upon his determination to assert his independence.

"Lay off o' me now. This flossy bird an' me's gotta come to a showdown. 'F he figures he kin come the prohibition agent on me, like he done yestiday when I wasn't feelin' good, an' then put up a play like he was a boss here, we gotta argue it out, 'n' that's all ther' is to it."

Templar squared his shoulders, as was his habit when about to embark upon action. He was still young enough to enjoy a dramatic situation, and he affected a bored tone of voice in order to accentuate it.

"Let him be, King. I don't want to call on you to control any one of the men you picked to bring here; though it's your funeral by rights. But I'd like all of you to remember one thing. What you fellows don't seem to realize is that there's not a gun in camp among you."

The burly Dockety shrank visibly as the high pressure of his belligerence oozed from him, and he sat down slowly. The others followed suit, their wide eyes and nervous, picking hands registering the dawning of realization that they had come to the kind of place they had read about, where policemen were not and where they were face to face with one another as individuals uncurbed by law.

Templar grinned at them.

"Never thought of that, did you? Just came out like babes in the wood. Not a gun among you—oh, yes, I made sure of that long ago. Well—" he rose and pushed back his chair and stood over them, suddenly aggressive in his turn—"neither have I any! I don't carry a gun. For the same reason I don't allow liquor in camp."

He let the words soak in.

"Now, Mr. Dockety, if you want to be sure who runs this camp, we'd better decide right now."

Dockety's mind was slow to assimilate new impressions. His little eyes flashed to the faces of the others and up to Templar's stern gaze and then back to the others, never meeting any single look and holding it—the animal uneasy. He met no encouragement. They were cowed by the coup, as he was himself. His eyes fell before the challenge in Templar's.

King relieved the situation and accepted the position by appealing to all.

"Of course there's got to be a nominal head or director or something over the work; and after all, I'm only my uncle's financial representative. So of course the boss should be Templar, who knows all about what's got to be done and all that." And he added, "Dontcher know."

"You're —— right," said Templar with emphasis. "And it isn't nominal either. I've been through this thing before, and I've learnt a heap; and I know how to run camp. So let's cut out the arguments and arrange schedule."

He sat down and grinned at them in all amity, now that his point was established; and they smiled back weakly—some of them. The cheerful grin faded slowly from Templar's face. He was not meeting with the straightforward response which he had been accustomed to find among the kind of men he had been accustomed to meet. He had known quarrels in other camps; but those, when they had once been decided one way or the other, had closed the incident. Nothing had been held back to rankle. But here somehow he felt that the incident was by no means closed. An uncomfortable premonition of future trouble came to him; and he wondered—very hard indeed.

The great condors circling in the thin blue ether high above craned their bald heads and turned their cold yellow eyes to watch those strange doings in the ravine. And as the condors watched, so did old Mamu the Soothsayer crane his withered neck over the edge of his rock and watch every gesture; and watching, he drew inferences of the character of each one and tabulated them against his future need to play upon them as he might contrive—which was another of the very astute teachings out of the lore of the ancient priests of the sun—as it was of the priesthood of many other peoples who had never heard of the people of the Inca.

The dominant one, he knew, of course. They had met before; and he knew him to be resourceful and terribly persistent as well as equipped with fearful magics known to the white men. Him Mamu regarded as his most dangerous adversary.

Three of the others he put down as of no account. They were weak and irresolute. Their only danger was that they had knowledge of that which *must* be kept secret.

But the fourth. The wizard judged him with keen attention. He was boastful; therefore vain. Loud and quarrelsome; yet controllable by a stronger will. Obviously evil-tempered. So much he could determine from the man's actions, without hearing or understanding more than varying tones of voice. A tool, the wizard counted him. To be used perhaps if need be and if the sun god would help, to destroy the others.

A situation not so hopeless for one who knew how to make use of the passions of men. In the meanwhile he could watch as tirelessly as did the great birds, the messengers of the sun god.

TEMPLAR let his amateur crew finish breakfast and light up their various selections of smoke before he introduced the distasteful subject of manual labor.

"One of the first things we've got to arrange," he began with a sly contracting of the eye-corners, "is about who takes first crack at cooking."

It was a bombshell.

"Cooking? Holy gee, I don't know a thing about cooking."

"Nor me."

"Me neither."

"Aw, ——, I yain't gonna do no pot-wrastlin' fer nobody."

Templar was in the delightful position of complete independence.

"All right, fellows; I don't care. I told you before we started that this camp was going to be one of the worst I've ever known. I told you you'd never be warm. I told you there was no firewood within forty miles, and all you'd ever see to burn would be chips from our scantlings. I told you there'd be no labor available. I told you you'd better bring a white cook; but you all figured you'd have to split shares with him and wouldn't do it. You all made your agreements with Mr. King with open eyes, and now it's your funeral.

"You can make any arrangement about grub you like. I'm wide open. We can each rustle our own if you want—it's inefficient; but as far as I'm concerned I'd be sure of good grub. Or, I'm willing to take my turn of eating what you fellows cook. I've been in camp before, and I've eaten worse grub than you fellows know how to spoil. Grub is the last thing to make me unhappy. I'm no sybarite."

There followed a silence full of consternation. Cooking in camp over a kerosene stove had appeared a sort of picnic idea to them from the viewpoint of far Broadway. But it took on a sinister aspect when they found themselves faced with the hard and immediate fact that somebody had to get up in the cold morning to make coffee and bacon.

Templar was human enough to enjoy the situation. There were a thousand men whom he would have chosen to bring with him rather than any one of the companions whom necessity had thrust upon him, and it gave him a sour satisfaction to see them suffer from their own deficiencies.

He let them reflect on the gloomy prospect while he went on to outline the vastly more important matter of the work that was to be done.

"Well, think over the grub prospect as we work, fellows. Here's what to do; and I'm aiming to get a start on it today. First there's the cut-off of that inflow. The flume. Half a week's work on that, and nothing that'll be heavy on your lily-white hands. Then the pipe-line. A little bit harder; but you'll be getting used to it. Three days on that. Then the *big* job—but no, 't isn't such a big job either—though I've more than a heap of respect for the old man of the mountain who lives up there."

Sheepish uneasiness was on the faces of all of them as they recollected the panic of the evening before. The desolate, steep-walled gorge, coupled with all its attendant discomforts, did, in point of fact, carry the impression of imprisonment in close proximity with a mysterious being of occult powers about whom they had heard so much. Dockety and his tout, who sat with their backs to the wizard's outpost, both stole glances over their shoulders.

"No, not right behind your ear, Marty. It's 'way up. See that pink-and-green-streaked rock up there? And back of it the remains of the Inca road? Well, the cave mouth is just behind that hidden by the rock. Now here's the job; nothing in itself, but I've an idea it's going to be the toughest of the lot, 'cause the only place we can get at the underground flow is inside that cave."

"What underground feed?" from Babson, the geologist.

"Well, it's this way — excuse the elementary stuff, Babson. You fellows can all see that there's a heap more water coming down 'way up the ravine than flows into the lake here. See that big fall up there? Well, most of that runs into a natural fissure in the sandstone, which is just an arm or a tunnel of the same system of underground drainage which formed the cave where the old man lives. It runs right along through the cave and then ducks under again and comes out somewhere under the surface of this lake. I've a theory that that is why the old Incas thought this to be something queer and made it sacred, and that's why they dumped the treasure into it."

That magic word! It chased the gloom which had settled over all of them at the dismal prospect of cooking and of—to them—hard labor. They brightened up amazingly and showed immediate interest. All except Babson. The elementary mysteries of geology had no interest for him, and the explanations were merely boring.

"What we want to know," he interrupted impatiently, "is how you're going to put a cork in that underground system and keep it out of here. I don't see any divide or watershed or anything. Suppose you do cork it up; it's got nowhere else to go. It'll just fill up the hole or the cave or the tunnel or whatever it is, and then overflow and keep right on coming."

"Just what I'm coming to," said Templar. "The old Inca engineers cut an artificial channel and side-tracked that water. Built a stone dam right across the edge of an awful hole where the river plunged down to connect with our lake, and side-tracked the whole stream down another fissure. My guess is that they ran it off as part of their wonderful water-supply system of old Cuzco."

"Well. How'd it get back in here then?"

"That's where the old wizard came in with trumps. I had everything fixed up here; siphon going fine; and I'd reduced the water-level by nearly twenty feet when he busted the dam and flooded me out. So our job is to repair the dam. Not such an awful job in itself. Yet—I don't know—that old wizard—he's a darned shrewd old man."

Dockety's belligerent scowl came very easily to his face.

"Aw, ——!" he grunted. "Ther' ain't no old man gonna keep *me* from gettin' at that dough. 'F he gives any trouble leave 'm to me."

"Yah! Yuh wasn't dat noivy yestid'y," Marty jeered at him.

Dockety flared out. The more readily since here was safe opportunity to reestablish some of his lost prestige.

"You shut right up. I wasn't in no shape yestid'y. I yain't scared o' that boid. No, nor nobody else neither."

The last with sulky bravado. Templar affected not to have noticed the implication. Work was to be done. He broke up the conference and tried to infect his crew with some of his own enthusiasm.

It was no very brilliant success. Work, physical labor, was an effort that was foreign to all of these people—except perhaps to Dockety. But that had been a long time ago; and since those days he had developed that "line of graft" which accounted for his present comfortable condition.

Still, by dint of strenuous example, progress of a sort was achieved, though the few-days estimate for the repair of the flume dragged on into ten. It was not a very shipshape job, and would never have passed the scrutiny even of an inspector of street-cleaning. But Templar let it go; after all it would not have to stand for more than a month or so, and then the gold would be theirs.

It was only the constant promise of the rich reward that kept the crew at their job at all. Each succeeding day saw them grumbling louder and snarling more readily at one another, as the soreness of their hands kept pace with the soreness of their digestions.

The food, in truth, was awful. The first lot had fallen upon the geologist, and his very best efforts seemed to indicate that he was earnestly striving to perpetuate specimens of his profession. Tempers suffered accordingly. There was nothing new about any of it. It has happened in all camps, and will so continue to happen.

"Feed the brute" is one of the wisest of our maxims; for the men are few whose souls can rise above the discomforts of a continuously unsatisfactory cuisine. Those who go out into far-away camps know it. The most Christian and forbearing of men will disclose a savage temper after a poor dinner.

In this camp all the dinners were below the minus mark of imperfection; and these men were of the great metropolitan order of sybarites, except Templar, who could eat, when occasion demanded—as can all the brethren of his craft—anything at all.

But the others. They came to mess reluctantly, with an anticipatory grumble which developed into the growling of bears as they viewed the mess which was spread before them. Babson growled back and challenged those who didn't like it to take on the job themselves. But loudest growlers as is the custom of camps, shrank from drawing upon their own heads a similar measure of disapproval—and growled the louder therefore.

And on the top of it all, it was cold. Permanently cold—and no satisfying warmth of recuperation in meals. Quite the worst camp he had known, as Templar had warned them. He began to be uneasy about the sullen tempers of his crew.

* * *

AND as ceaselessly as the ill-omened condors, old Mamu the Soothsayer watched. He haunted them. All day the round bald dome of his skull could be distinguished peering over the edge of his rock. And every evening with the setting of the sun, just as the swift darkness was beginning to swoop down on the narrow gorge, he would leap to his feet, a ragged portent the color of a smear of blood in the last rays, and would call upon his god for inspiration to save the sacred trust of his fathers from these white men who profaned the place of the tabu.

The wailing echoes crawled up and down the ravine and added a chill premonition of their own to the prevailing dissatisfaction.

Dockety the superstitious remembered some half-forgotten tale of his youth about the last of the harpists, perched upon a high crag, cursing some English invader, and he experienced an uneasy prickling of his spinal hair. He shook his fists up at the wizard and shrieked curses back at him; and then, half-ashamed at his display of nerves, growled:

"Gee, that boid gimme the willies. I'd liked to see 'm miss his step jes' oncet. Haw, haw! He'd sure flatten out some."

"If he was to miss right now, he'd likely flatten you," said King sourly. "It's a clear drop from up there."

But the old wizard had no nerves. He stood on his dizzy brink and looked down with the same beady-eyed scrutiny as did the great carrion birds from the crags. His only concern was keen observation of everything that these white men did.

Queer, the old man thought, how they quarreled and snarled at one another over their work. If they hated it so, why then did they work? There was no overseer with a whip driving them. Yet they drove themselves for the sake of the gold they coveted. How they mucked and scrabbled for that poor metal which could be used only for ornament, these white men! Of a surety they must all be mad for that metal.

Old Mamu was quite unable to conceive the extent of the physical discomfort to which they were subjecting themselves—what with the perennial cold and the high elevation that caught at their starved lungs and the wretched food that gnawed at their starved stomachs—all for the sake of the gold. But he could see the effect of their privations on their tempers.

"What wouldn't these white men do for gold?" he cogitated aloud to himself. "What had not those other white men whom the legends of his fathers told of done for gold? If the ancient records written in knotted strings were true, they had suffered inconceivable hardships and committed unthinkable crimes for that yellow stuff which could serve no useful purpose, but which seemed to have the power to make them mad."

If these men became so affected by the mere hope of finding gold at the bottom of the lake, what would they not do if they could see some of the hoard that *he* knew about?

Once again there came over his face the slow deepening of the thousand furrows and the thin stretching of the lips which indicated that the old man chuckled inwardly.

"Ha!" he muttered to himself with cold satisfaction. "*There* was a sacred trust which I am quite sure is known to no living creature but myself—and perhaps to the great condors, the sun birds, that have watched unceasingly from the beginning of time."

As if to remind him that arrogation of all knowledge to himself was a presumption, an enormous king condor—with the white bands under its wings—dropped from above in a vast volplane and hurtled down the ravine on motionless pinions in one grand, glorious swoop; so close that he could hear the swish of the wind through its great feathers and could see the cold glitter in its yellow eye.

The bird turned its bald, wattled head to look at him as it swept past and croaked sepulchrally, hoping doubtless, as did Dockety, that the frail old man would lose his balance and so furnish a meal.

But to the wizard it was no other than a warning against presumption. He amended his chuckle therefore. The secret was known, of course, to the Lord Sun and to the sun birds, his messengers; but of all living human beings, to himself alone. For the ancient records knotted into colored strings had it that the priests of the sun, when they had once come to the inexorable decision that never must the fatal knowledge come to the white men, had killed off all those others, slaves and weaker vessels, who knew and might be tempted or tortured to tell.

There was a power to render a world of white men mad! *There* was a latent force, hidden in the heart of his hills! If these men reverted so easily toward the animal at the thought of a mere small consignment of the Inca's ransom, what would they not do if——

The old man's muttering suddenly ceased. He stood tense, quivering throughout his body, while his thin, claw-like fingers slowly closed like the grip of a raptorial bird and his beady eyes glittered as had the eye of that condor. A tremendous thought began to take form in his brain.

That condor! The sun bird!

It was a message. Lord Sun had sent his messenger with that thought! That was why the bird had come so close and had spoken so ominously. It was an inspiration direct from his god!

The ancient priest flung out his arms and cried his worship aloud.

"*Illappa! Inti, Ccana arajpacha!* Lord Sun, Light of the Heavens! Thine ancient servant hears. Glorious is the Sun. Lord over all the earth!"

He left the shrill echoes to drift up and down the ravine and scuttled back into his cave, into the inner chamber of mysteries, to make a mighty wizardry.

"—— OLD scarecrow!" and, "I'm gonna twist that boid's neck one o' them days," and, "What the —— is he crowing about now?" were some of the growls that went up from the toilers below.

Templar seized upon the opportunity to improve the shining hour with a crude attempt to play upon the psychological reactions of his crew.

"He's cussing us out, fellows, 'cause we've got the flume done and we're that much nearer to the treasure. Let's dig in on the pipe-line and fix up the siphon. Just a three-day job"—he still clung to his hopeless estimate of their capabilities—"and then we'll tackle the dam. Just a dozen blocks of stone to be put back in place. They're lying ready to hand. An easy afternoon. *Then*, boys, nothing to do but sit down and wait for the yellow ingots to shine up through the bottom."

A crude attempt. So might a schoolteacher have exhorted wayward pupils. How much keener a juggler of men's minds was that untutored old wizard!

The response was not so enthusiastic as might have been hoped; though quite as much as might have been expected. Dyspeptic men do not rush merrily to labor, and they are inclined to be sourly argumentative.

"Thought you said there'd be some digging to be done. How about the sediment of a few hundred years?"

"Sediment, shucks."

Templar belittled the dismal thought. "This is a rock formation. There's nothing coming down from above to settle. Sure, there'll be a little muck; must be. But, gee whiz, I can see you fellows licking that off when you get a ten-pound ingot of gold in your hands."

It was beginning to work in spite of its crudeness. That magic word was sure of response.

"——!" Dockety breathed. "*Ten pounds!* At how much d'ja say an ounce? Twenty bucks? I'm a sonuva gun! Ther' ain't noth'n' I wouldn't lick off'n a ten-pound ingot o' gold."

"I'll bet you there ain't," was an acid comment to this. Aggravated by—

"Nor ther' ain't noth'n' yuh wouldn't do for a dozen of 'em."

The innuendos began to soak in.

Dockety's temporary flash of good humor turned to instant belligerence.

"Say!" he bellowed. "What 'n —— youse guys think you're doin'? Makin' a monkey outa me? I seen you do worse than lick mud, Tommy King; and don't yuh ferget that I knows them as 'd like to know it neither. Yeah, yuh don't gotta look sideways at me, brother. An' you, Marty, shut yer face right up, or——"

"Oh for ——'s sake!" Templar shouted. "Let's cut out this scrapping and get down to work. Here, grab that Stillson, King, and gimme a hand; and you two fellows carry pipe. Come on, get busy."

King came meekly enough. The very thought of possible disclosures by the other cowed him. Dockety, however, glared rebellion. Once started, he was the pig-headed type that hated to be foiled of his say-so. But Templar had already turned his back and was busy with the couplings of the rusted old pump.

Dockety's belligerence was the kind that required wordy argument and loud invective to rouse it to the point of active hostility—dogs show a high development of the same tendency. Lacking the counter irritation, Dockety moved off to do as he was told, but satisfied his honor, as is the habit of his type, by mumbling audibly what he would do one of these days to that stuck-up louse who tried to come the boss over him.

Templar was wise enough to let it pass. Work was more important than fruitless quarreling. Some day, he knew, the inevitable conflict would come to a head; but he hoped to postpone it to the time when the work would be finished and they would be sitting waiting for the siphon to empty out the lake. Nor was he very sure what the result of that conflict would be—Dockety was a big man and burly, though soft—yet it was a prime necessity that he should maintain his ascendency till the work was accomplished. After that it would not matter.

He set himself to taking out leaky sections of the heavy six-inch pipe and replacing them with new ones, affecting not to hear Dockety's slighting remarks each time he came near.

The pipe-line ran from the lip of the lake close under the cliff edge and continued on down the gorge. It rounded the sharp angle of the cliff and extended for a couple of miles in order to drop sufficiently below the lake bottom to exert the siphon suction. It was here that even Dockety had to admit a grudging appreciation of Templar's foresight in having his mules unloaded exactly where he said and nowhere else; for the new sections of pipe lay close to hand where they were needed.

Otherwise it was certain that the repairs to the pipe-line would have taken very much longer than the estimated three days; for ten-foot lengths of six-inch pipe are no pretty toys for tender hands and chilled fingers to carry. As it was, the carriers worked in relays and cursed the heavy lengths of metal and one another as they panted in the unaccustomed elevation and sweated in the cold. Tempers were awful. An acrid argument between King and Babson resulted in blows; all because one had dropped his end of the pipe they were carrying and had jarred the frozen fingers of the other.

Dockety circled the scuffling pair as a malemuit circles a dog fight, itching for half an excuse to join in. Templar separated the combatants with difficulty; though neither of them were fighting men by inclination. It was just that their systems had reached the point of explosion. Cooking had fallen to Marty; and his feeble-witted efforts were so bad that even Templar would have growled had it not been for his boast that food made no difference to him.

But he saw wisdom in removing Marty from office and putting the burden on King, who at least could apply intelligence to his attempt. He would more than gladly have taken over the job himself; and he knew at least the elements of palatable camp cooking.

But with his wretchedly inept crew, what could he do? There was not one of them who had even the ability of the average handy man. Their lives had been in sheltered paths where there had always been somebody else to find the hammer and drive the tack. It was as much as he could expect of them to pull half-heartedly when he said so, and to push with a feeble will at his insistent word.

Yet the job was completed at last. The pipe-line was repaired and the new pump installed. It was a double-lever hand pump which required but fifteen minutes of labor to suck the water over the lip of the lake and below the level on the other side; after which, atmospheric pressure, as Templar had vainly tried to explain to the obtuse Dockety, would do the rest. Yet even Dockety had to believe his ears when he heard the tinkly, rushing sound of water coursing through the pipe at high speed; and he looked eagerly from the pipe to the lake, as if expecting to see it dwindle before his eyes.

Templar was a weary man. Not because of the physical work which had fallen upon him; he was young enough and strong enough to enjoy action. But the anxiety and strain of keeping his sullen crew on the job and keeping them from flying at one another's throats had worn him out. There was no joy left in accomplishment.

"Let it rest, fellows," he said as he straightened his back stiffly. "It won't make any difference to the lake, with all that underground flow coming in. But, gosh, I wanted to make sure that the darned thing would run. Let's call it a day. To-morrow I'll show you the way up to the cave, and we'll fix the dam; and then, thank ——, we're through. And I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll cook dinner. C'm on, let's go. Marty, it's your turn to collect up tools."

Like children he had to humor them along.

The rest needed no urging to scramble down from the lake edge and up the opposite slope to the tents. Marty stayed back and sulked. He thought—and said so with shrill revilings—that since Templar was going to relieve King of his job, the latter ought to collect tools. He, Marty, had done his bit all morning, hadn't he?

But his was a soul as pusillanimous as it was petty. He dared not rebel. So he sat himself down by the pipe-line in the single shaft of sunlight which found its way down into the ravine and showed his defiance by smoking a cigaret instead of gathering the tools. And so isolating himself and finding no sympathy among the others, he very naturally developed a bad case of grouch. Even when they hailed him from across the way to come and partake of the first eatable meal they had had in three weeks he preferred to revel in the luxury of feeling himself ill-used. The grouch took the form of a food grouch.

He'd show them, he would. He'd come when he was good and gol durned ready. What did he care for bacon and beans? He was sick of bacon anyway. A peevishly childish mentality had Marty.

And so it happened that the tragedy that was shaping itself fell upon him. Fell with appalling swiftness out of a clear sky. Surely the direct machination of the sun god.

Old Mamu the Soothsayer, who had seen every move of the work below and had watched the installation of the pump, knew that the second step toward the uncovering of the trust that was in his frail old hands had been accomplished. He knew nothing about the theory of a siphon or of the use of a hand pump. But he had no need to scramble back along the old road to look down and see what was happening at the other end of that long black snake of a pipe-line. He had done all that the first time that this so terribly persistent engineer man had invaded his solitudes.

He knew that a solid six-inch stream of water was spouting far out from the distant nozzle and that it was all coming from his sacred lake. How it was done, he did not know. It was one of the magics that these white men possessed. Time and high time, therefore, to introduce his counter magic which he had prepared out of the wisdom that had come down to him with the lore of his forefathers. The shrewd magic of playing upon men's minds.

Ripe time to send a message of that magic which Lord Sun had put into his mind through the medium of the great bird, his messenger.

Old Mamu, therefore, staggered from his cave and stood erect upon his rock, bearing the message. An oblong thing about the length of his forearm and as thick as the span of his hand, roughly squared, with ancient tool-marks showing upon its surface; so old that the edges were softened and rubbed down. He held the thing aloft to his god's scrutiny—though it was all his frail old arms could accomplish—and cried aloud for guidance.

"*Ccana arajpacha*, Lord of the Heavens, is it well? Behold the message of the power that is. Is the time propitious, Lord Sun?"

"What the —— is the old fool up to now?" growled King, looking up with irritation from his view-point by the mess-table.

"Cussing us out because we've got the next step finished," said Templar happily. "He knows that all we've got to do is dam the underground channel in his cave; and then the treasure will be ours."

"Lord Sun, advise thy servant," the old

man shrilled high above them, standing motionless, presenting his burden on stiff arms above his rapt face.

His crimson poncho flared out again with that startling effect of an ominous splotch of blood painted against the cliff face; and from below they damned him for the uneasy impression it gave.

A dark speck that floated in the thin air—surely at the very feet of the sun—watching with its telescopic eyes every little thing that happened upon the god's footstool, dropped with closed wings like a plummet to see what possible food the old man held in his hands as if about to cast it from him.

It was the direct response to the prayer. The sign that the priest awaited. He knew from many years of watching that the sun sent a shaft far down into the ravine to claim it as his own. It was proper that the message drop in that sacrosanct patch. He had no need to look. He knew exactly where it was—just below his rock.

"Lord Sun!" he cried in an ecstacy of adoration. "Thy servant sends thy message of the hidden power. Let Lord Sun guide it aright."

And he let his arms come down stiff as they were, and dropped the thing over the edge of his rock to hurtle down the path of light into the patch that the sun had chosen—the patch in which sat Marty nursing his grouch!

"MY ——! Look out! Jump, for——"

Marty was aware only of a horror-stricken confusion of shrieks before the thing struck him, square between the neck and shoulders as he sat humped up beside the pipe.

For a petrified second the others caught their breath; then rushed to the spot. To their credit it must be said that not one of them gave a thought to the possibility of more deadly missiles from above. They jumped, rolled or scrambled down the rubble-strewn slope below the tents; and not one of them felt his bruises.

Templar was the first to reach the spot. He snatched the blood splashed block from the crushed thing that had been Marty and tossed it aside—receiving even in his haste a wondering impression of its weight. In the next second Dockety limped up beside him, cursing with the same unconscious fury as he rubbed a wet rent above his knee. King was eager to help lift the mangled mess; but the hot red smear in his hand and the grate of mashed bones overcame him, and he turned away to be horribly sick. Babson shrank away from the sight.

Templar arose, ash-colored and trembling.

"It's—it's no use, fellows. He's——"

He felt the surge of his bowels up to his throat and broke off to grip his jaws together and swallow hard several times.

Dockety's fiber was too coarse to feel any squeamishness, but was the more open, therefore, to fierce rage. It was not that he had any particular affection for his tout; he was but responding to the primitive man's resentment at one of his very own kind being done to death by a member of another tribe. He shook his fists up at the sacred rock and frothed threats of appalling profanity about what he would do to that old man when he should catch him. Never a very coherent person, his voice was unequal to the vehemence of his fury, and he spluttered and stammered his epithets in senseless repetition.

His rage began to affect the others as the first sick horror of the sight passed and left room for anger. Explosive growls of minor passion began to mingle with the fouler invective.

Even Templar swore that this was the limit of what could be borne. Twice before had the wizard accomplished the death of white men who sought to wrest his treasure from its hiding. And now this one. The spirit of retaliation was strong within him. As a matter of self-protection, he was persuading himself, this menace must be removed.

Yet as he framed the words and harbored the thought without any definite plan of its accomplishment, there forced itself into his intemperate anger the insinuating proviso—if possible. That wizard, feeble and helpless old man though he was, somehow seemed to win every time.

Then he shook the insinuation from his mind with angry impatience and vowed again that this tragedy must be atoned. Instinctively with his decision his reaction was to look up to the place associated with the object of his proposed vengeance.

And there the ancient bald head was visible against the sky, craning over the edge and looking down on the group.

Old Mamu, at first complimented by the eager rush of the white men to gather in the message of his god, was looking anxiously now to discover what the uproar was about that floated up to his perch. Something was wrong. This was not the reaction that the wisdom of his fathers had taught him to expect from such a message. He saw them bunched together over something. He could detect agitation, anger— But about what?

Then somebody moved and gave him a clearer view, and his keen old eyes could see it all; the whole hideous mess that his message had made. For a moment he lay as he was, thunderstruck, appalled at the result of his magic. Then understanding came to him, and he leaped to his feet with a shriek.

His long arms flung out to the sun, and his thin voice broke into high falsettos as he screamed his conviction of his faith.

"A sign! An omen! It is the sign of my fathers of old! Lord Sun has taken his sacrifice!"

Then he turned from his rock and fled.

Down in the horrible ravine the men shivered, as they always did at the cold, crawling echoes of his cry; then covered their confusion with renewed curses and angry threats of vengeance.

Babson's voice checked them. There was a choked, hysterical note in it which caused them to turn quickly. He was kneeling by the fatal message, the square-hewn block which lay where Templar had tossed it.

"Say, boys! This—this is something that's queerer than all— Say, come and look at this."

They moved toward him, half-expecting some further gruesome detail. But Babson held the thing on his knee and regarded it with avid incredulity. He was not master of his voice.

"This—this thing. It's— Here, Templar, you take a look. You ought to know. It's— Looks to me like it's solid gold!"

"Wha-at?"

Templar remembered his impression of the weight of the thing and knelt quickly to examine it again.

It was dull yellow—where it was not smeared sticky red—and had that peculiar soft appearance which is a distinguishing mark of the virgin metal.

"Great ——!" he breathed. "It—I almost believe it is! Turn it over and let's look."

Their elbows clashed as they both rubbed impatient sleeves over the stained surface, all careless of the gruesome film that hid the thing. Templar snatched for his clasp-knife and picked blindly at the blade, unable to take his eyes off the wonder, cursing softly as his thumb-nail tore. With a grunt of impatience he opened it with his teeth and picked at the soft metal. He rubbed his sleeve and picked again; then scratched tentatively at a darker, harder portion.

Slowly he lifted his head and met the eyes of Babson, who was looking at him with the same wondering incredulity. Both whispered the same hoarse thought together.

"It isn't possible."

"If it was solid I'd believe it."

Templar spoke in excited defense of his unbelief.

"It would just be a smelted ingot. But— But, good ——, man, this is *ore!*"

Babson nodded.

"Friable smoky quartz," he added.

"More than three-quarters of it pure metal!" murmured Templar. "About thirty-five pounds of it!"

"And *chiseled* out!"

Babson nodded his portentous discovery.

"Cut clear out of the parent ore body!"

"Gosh! There isn't any ore that rich!" from both together again. "This is three-quarters solid gold!"

The others crowded in on the two technicians—the five-minute-old tragedy already taking a second place in the presence of that magic word—demanding translation of this incredible thing into terms fit for laymen.

"It means," said Templar, "that this isn't an ingot. It hasn't been melted and poured into a mold. That would mean nothing more than that we had a thirty-five pound lump of gold. No, this thing is native ore! It grew like that. It's been cut—not blasted, mind you, but cut—with cold-chisels out of the lode. D'you get what that means?"

"How big a body?" asked King. "Lemme see."

He dared in his eagerness to crowd Dockety. That one swept him aside with a ferocious snarl.

"Git outa me road, ye louse. Hey, lemme see. Gimme it."

He pushed a large paw between Templar and Babson and took the unbelievable sample to himself and turned it over, eying it with dull avidity. His eyes glinted up from under corrugated brows to demand clearer understanding.

"Yuh say there's more o' this?"

"There must be a vein of it. Or at least a pocket."

"How big?"

"Lord knows. But even if it's no more than a pocket, that stuff'll run over four-hundred thousand dollars to the ton! That'll be a lump about as big as a cord of wood!"

Babson, as well as Dockety and King, gasped at the visualization of what would have been mere figures otherwise.

"Gee!" muttered Dockety. "Gee! An' that boid up there knows where it's at?"

The thought startled them all.

"Phe-e-ew!"

A thin whistle from Babson.

King licked a dry mouth and swallowed noisily. Templar found his voice first, though it was only a whisper.

"By ——, I believe he must! Fellows, this must be the Inca mine. The lost mine—where the ransom was coming from—all of it! If we— Maybe we can bribe the old man and—if we treat him nice, maybe he'll——"

"Aw, ——!"

Dockety interrupted him with a short, ugly laugh.

"If that boid knows where it is, there ain't nothin' kin keep me from findin' out."

King mumbled agreement.

"Yeah, we'll *have* to find out, by hook or by crook."

Babson nodded.

THE magic was beginning to work. Thoughts of vengeance had gone from the minds of all four; swept into oblivion by the vastly more important considerations of the possibility of propitiation.

A mine of that unbelievable richness that the old Spanish conquerors spoke of! Perhaps *the* mine; the source of the fabled wealth of the Incas! If that could be possible! Somewhere up in these barren mountains. A force to make a world of white men mad.

Dockety broke the hard-breathing silence.

"C'm on. Let's start. How kin we get up there?"

"Out by the lower end of the gorge; then there's a place where it isn't so steep, and we can climb up to the old Inca road."

"All right. Let's get a move on."

Faces turned down the gorge, and there was a general movement, though undecided, waiting for some one to take the initiative. But Templar's engineer mind turned instinctively to the work accomplished with such difficulty.

"Somebody's got to stay and guard the works," he said. "We can't risk getting all this busted up. And"—as an afterthought—"we've got to do something about—about Marty."

Dockety whirled on him with a snarl.

"Yuh poor blasted simp! Ain't yuh got no sense? We gotta *git that man*. When we done that we kin fool around fixin' things."

The weight of opinion was clearly with him. A new factor had come into the uneven tenor of their way, a force that transcended all other considerations. A magic that inflamed men's brains.

Templar was stung by Dockety's aggressive tone; but he said nothing, casting about in his mind for a compromise. Dockety was quick to grasp the ascendency which came with majority opinion.

" 'F yuh wanna guard, go ahead and stick yourself. There ain't none of us gonna take no risk o' losin' that mine on account o' this junk you says is in the lake. We gotta look out for ourselves, ain't we? Whadda *we* get outa the gol durn lake? Jes' chicken-feed, that's all. More'n half of it goes to old man King. If we finds a mine independent, we splits four ways. Ain't it so?"

"You're durn right," and, "You bet," came the hearty support of the majority.

Neither Templar nor any one of the others was in any frame of mind to give sober thought to a question of ethics. The evil magic of gold by the ton was coursing hot and fast through their blood. In a more sober mood Templar would probably have compromised with his conscience by allotting a fifth share to the financier of the expedition. But just now ready irritation lay close under the surface of hysterical excitement. Wherefore Templar went beyond the just proportion in his stand for grubstake law. His shoulders squared characteristically.

"Oh! So that's how you crooks think? You'd double-cross your uncle, yeh? What difference does it make where we find gold? He grubstaked the outfit, and he gets his half of all findings."

This was direct invitation to conflict. The assertion was received with a scream.

"What? More'n half of *our* mine, that he never even heard of? Not while *I* can kick!"

"Nor I, by ——!"

"No, nor me neither."

Dockety thrust his face aggressively close to Templar's, his jaw protruding and his lips curled down at the corners. Battle for the gold that he considered his was in evidence in every line of his body.

"See here, fellers, this here's gotta come to a showdown. Now listen. Me, I ain't gonna give up no half o' my share to no man. Git that! I'm square, I am. I gits an even quarter of what we makes outa our mine. 'F youse guys wants ter make presents to your uncles an' friends, go ahead an' make 'em But me—" his jaw thrust itself out, ferociously threatening—"I keeps my quarter. Now whadda ya gonna do about it?"

The other two came into the argument with loud approval. In spite of the aggressive one's blatant assertion of self-interest pure and simple, they were ready to accept him as champion of a principle by which they hoped to profit.

The aggressive challenge of the jaw was more than excited nerves could resist. What Templar did was to hit it. It was not so heavy a blow as he had intended; for one reason because he had never learned to hit effectively, and effective punching requires skill; and for another, because his toe, which was to give lift to the punch, slipped with the loose gravel which rolled from under it, and so lost most of its weight.

Dockety's reply was the throaty *arrgh* of any other animal coming to the grapple, rage and pain and lust of long-deferred battle combined. He swung both hands heavily, inexpertly. The one, Templar guarded with his own outflung arm; the other got home on his face. He drove a hard left which stopped Dockety's rush for a moment; and then his foot slipped again over the gravel, and he fell fortunately inside of the arc of the next ferocious swing. They locked in a clinch and wrestled.

There was no skill in the method of either of them. They fought just as any other two of the many millions who have never had a glove on in their lives. Neither knew how to break from a clinch with advantage and unscathed. So they clung and stamped and pulley-hauled till the treacherous gravel gave way from under their boots, and they fell, clinging still and dragging each other to the ground. There they wrestled and rolled and ground each other's elbows and shoulder-blades into the knobbly stones.

It was just the rough-and-tumble of two big men who had no skill. They panted and grunted with effort as they struggled to snatch free an arm every now and then to deliver a blow. And they rolled. Like scuffling cats they rolled till the slope they came to was steeper than where a pair of struggling men could control themselves. So they rolled on down, panting and snarling, into the icy little river that was the overflow from the lake.

Which was quite sufficient to put an end to the conflict. Both men were bruised and shaken enough by the fall to be glad of a respite; and the sudden gasping chill of a plunge into that icy water was sufficient to dampen the hottest ardor of battle.

So that when King and Babson helped them to scramble out and took upon themselves the belated rôle of peace-makers, neither of the combatants found himself sufficiently a winner to be anxious to push the matter to a finish.

It was all very unsatisfactory and indecisive and very inglorious. Just another added to the long list of similar outbursts that have been part of the history of most gold strikes. The only point that was settled by the struggle was that they would now not be able to make the proposed surprize visit on the wizard till the next day. For the way was roundabout and long; and time had been lost; and it was very urgently necessary that the combatants strip and warm their chilled circulations and change into dry clothes as the first immediately necessary precaution against the fierce pneumonia of those Andean altitudes which strikes at a white man's starved lungs with the sudden virulence of a clammy snake.

For the rest, nothing was settled. Dockety was not satisfied that he could not make himself boss of the camp. Nor had Templar succeeded in establishing his own ascendency. Both remained dissatisfied and bellicose, and neither had the complete support of the other two.

Surely was the magic working that the old wizard had made.

Templar was able to understand it to some extent. He had seen gold camps before. He laughed sourly as he rasped at his back with a rough towel.

"We're a bunch of —— fools, fellows; scrapping about the division of a mine which we haven't got; something we're only guessing about. Maybe the old man doesn't know anything anyhow."

But the others were loth to give up their sudden brilliant dream.

"He must know. Everybody says that

those old witch-doctors have all kinds of secrets.

"Sure he knows; else why would he have thrown that brick? He wasn't aiming to mash Marty, or he'd have used any old rock.

"You bet he knows; and what's more, he wants us to come up.

"Maybe there's a trap in it somewhere; but I, for one, am darn well going to see."

"Ah, now you're talking," Templar agreed with them. "I'm willing to believe that he may know something; but nothing on earth will persuade me that he wants to tell us. I know that old man; and I'm telling you that he's nobody's fool. There's a trap in it somewhere, I'll lay my hat. I'm game to start right out tomorrow with the rest of you and see what we can do to persuade him to talk. But take it from me, he's got a trick up his sleeve."

"Betcha life we'll persuade him to talk," was Dockety's grim obsession. "Leave 'm to me, gents. All I says is, get ahold of him. Youse kin try your moral-suasion stuff all yuh likes, 'n' then give'm to me. *I'll* make 'm talk; an' I don't want no more'n my quarter share neither. I'm square."

Templar was willing to let it go at that, for the present at all events.

"All right; let's cut out the arguments and call it a go. Suits me. And now, fellows, there's a job on hand. I don't know about you; but I'm going to use a digging-tool."

He took a spade, and with a set face, without turning his head, went down to the stream bed where a patch of sand showed. Babson and King followed him, and presently Dockety.

When it was all over and they were back at the tents, cheerfulness amounting almost to cordiality reasserted itself. It was impossible to refrain from rosy speculations about the possibility of the wizard knowing something about the location of that miraculous mine that furnished the Inca's ransom, and the further possibility then of inducing him to reveal the stupendous secret; and from that, in a single bound, to ways and means of removing all that mass of gold without being robbed of an ingot or two, or without paying a just tax to the Government of the country—for such is the way of that magic metal that has the power to make men mad.

"Well!" Templar ruffled his hair and sat back and ended the futile discussion with:

"Let's sleep on it. Tomorrow we'll have a showdown of the old man's tricks."

So they turned in and slept, wearily enough, for they had had a strenuous day; yet not too wearily to be regaled with the wildest of dreams. It was a more contented camp than it had been since the day of its inception.

AND while they slept and dreamed of the vast treasure that would be theirs old Mamu the wizard crouched in his cave and planned how to keep from them even the little treasure that lay in the sacred lake. For he had no tricks at all—yet.

His god had sent him a message and an idea, and he had obeyed. Perhaps—if he helped himself to the utmost of his poor power—his god would help him again to maintain the trust that his fathers had handed down through the long years.

In the great inner chamber of his cave he crouched before the feet of two gigantically tall stone figures which towered up into the gloom beyond the flickering light of his torch of *yareta* moss from the high slopes below the snow line. Between the two monoliths—which looked surprizingly like totem poles—was a great slab or seat of stone, square-hewn with the scrupulous care of the old workmen of the Inca.

The old man muttered a long half-hour of prayers or incantations or something, and then rose with reverence and pressed with all his feeble strength upon the farther edge of the stone slab. With a harsh grating of stone upon stone it pivoted upon its middle and swung downward, disclosing a dark, square hole. A fine dust of ages floated up as the lid jarred back against its counterpoise.

The wizard brought his torch and peered into the ancient coffer. With solemn veneration he made the sign of the circle and the square, and then he reached his wasted arm into the depths and brought forth a mass of colored strings, knotted in long lengths and short lengths with knots of many queer shapes and designs. Carefully he sorted the mass into individual bundles.

Held in the hand, they looked like mere tangles of string. But the wizard selected three out of the indistinguishable mess and laid them out on the floor. Before these he knelt and sorted out the lines and laid them in set designs according to some sort of formula which he muttered constantly to himself.

The individual bundles, starting each

with its thicker main stem, and branching out into minor lines and leaders, formed, when the rite was completed, a design for all the world like the pattern of a family tree. Over them the soothsayer pored and traced the designs with a skinny forefinger and muttered his findings to himself.

These were the *quipus* of the Inca, the lore of the ancient priests before him, recorded in the string writing of their craft. Others in the general tangle were the history of his lost people. With these he was not concerned. What he studied now was the wisdom of his fathers. The three books he had chosen dealt with the treasure in the lake, the cave of mysteries in which he lived, and the mine; and he read in them the tale of their beginnings and the precautions and incantations and curses which the wise ones before him had discovered and laid down for their keeping.

For long hours he read, far into the night. And then at last he lifted his head and sat staring out into the farther blackness, motionless for another hour, till slowly, by the dying light of the last of seven torches, it might have been seen that the thousand furrows of the aged parchment face wrinkled and spread and cracked yet a little deeper. The wizard smiled.

THE morning broke cold and crisp and propitious. The sun shone, of course—though it would be full four hours before it would climb high enough to send its feeble warmth into the ravine. But for all that Templar was not compelled to wake each sleeper three or four times before the party gathered, grouchy and shivering, round a belated ten-o'clock breakfast.

Today they were up and eager. Nobody cursed the coffee nor slandered the bacon. The meal was no more acrimonious than that of any party of amateur auto-campers on a chill Fall morning in the Adirondacks. It was accomplished without a quarrel; and the party was ready to start out on the glorious prospect by seven A.M.

Every man was heavily armed with a brace of flashlights in addition to a patent miner's lamp which burned carbid and fastened by a spring to the front of their hats—Templar's canny provision against the work he had expected to do in the cave. He suggested in addition a length of rope.

"That old Inca road is little more than a legend, and some of it will be Alpine climbing," he said. "We may find a rope darn useful to tie ourselves together with."

"Yeah, bring a rope," Dockety agreed with a gruff laugh. "We'll be needin' it to tie somebody up with—an' I could mebbe use the end of it too—with a coupla knots tied in p'r'aps, if yer gentle Christian 'suasion don't work. What all presents yer figurin' on showin' him?"

"Darned if I know really."

Templar frowned as he pushed his hat back to run his fingers through his hair for inspiration.

"I've got a compass and a radio dial watch that buzzes an alarm and a mess of sardines and such. But I don't know what more to offer."

"More? Say, what more dja wanna give that boid? He's noth'n but a naked cannibal, ain't he? An' here's you givin' up the only grub 'at we kin eat. Lay offa that. Give 'm a shoit an' a hat an' a prayer-book. That's what those guys always gits."

"Oh, let him have the sardines."

This from Babson.

"After all, that isn't much to give for an Inca mine."

"No! a clasp-knife or something instead of grub," was King's contention.

The question was already developing into an argument. Templar took swift measures.

"Oh, for Pete's sake, let's take it all and see what he wants."

And so, loaded down with the whole collection, they set out to make their propitiatory visit on the old wizard who had lived a hundred years—or possibly more—without any of these things.

The way up to the ruined path was not very far. After debouching from the gorge the sheer cliff began to change to a softer formation. Falls of eroded sandstone and long slides scarred the steep face every now and then till, some two miles farther, a steep, boulder-stream slope offered the possibility of a stiff climb up to where the thin, almost defaced thread showed where had once been a proud highway.

Such slopes have a way of looking quite easy of negotiation from the bottom. Templar regarded it with skepticism; but the others loudly insisted that the thing offered no difficulties for them—they were all young men, not cripples; and they were in much too impatient a mood to go scouting several miles farther till they should find a more favorable place.

They reckoned without the heart-breaking effect of an altitude of fourteen thousand feet on unaccustomed lungs—to say nothing of dyspeptic stomachs. Still, the climb was accomplished—for the incentive was great. Something over a thousand feet it was, at an average angle of eighty degrees—and it took them an hour and a half. They reached the path with no worse physical hurt than sundry bruises. But in the inverse ratio had their tempers suffered.

King, physically in the poorest condition, was particularly savage—though all of them, for that matter, lay on their stomachs on the path, which was hardly more than a ledge, and gasped for breath in great shuddering sobs, straining their bursting lungs for the oxygen that thin air had little of to offer. But King's plight was more serious. Nearly an hour passed—while the others growled their impatience at him—before the acute pain in his lungs and the pounding in his overstrained heart subsided sufficiently to permit him to proceed.

And then it was found that he was one of those people whose nervous systems were unable to face altitudes. The narrow, crumbling path with its sheer slides and appalling precipices made him dizzy to the extent of compelling him to shrink against the cliff wall and cover his eyes and shriek that he could never take another step. The rope proved to be a godsend. They tied him between two of themselves, Alpine fashion, and dragged him with them—all of which was no sort of restorative for ragged tempers.

The quite unreasonable reaction of the three who were not too terrified to be vindictive was an impulse to vent their spleen on the poor old wizard who was the direct cause of all this effort. Babson merely damned indiscriminately with King at each alternate check. Dockety of course was savagely animal.

"I'm a —— mutt if I come this here hike for nothin'," he swore through gritted teeth as he longed to kick King, whose place in the line was before him. " 'F that old duck don't wanna talk, an' durn quick, too, you watch me. Gosh blast yuh, Tommy King, ye yellow pup, if yuh don't get on I'll cut loose. Wait till I git me hands on that bald-headed old coot. It'll cost him two mines to pay for this. Git on there, ye louse."

Even Templar was exasperated to the point of being in accord with stern measures if the old man should prove to be recalcitrant. Three times before had the old wizard, feeble and old and untutored though he was, foiled him in spite of all his youth and modern science. But not this time, he swore to himself with set teeth and outthrust chin.

When at last they came round the sharp bend and found themselves looking into the dark mouth of the great cave, they were a crew of men much too grim and determined to experience any of that creepy hesitation which comes to those about to plunge into the black bowels of the earth.

They waited only to adjust their lamps before entering—and found that each of them had brought a nice new shiny carbid lamp, and that Templar had shoved a can of carbid in with the sardines; but none of them, in the excitement of the start, had thought of water.

"There's water in there, of course," said Templar. "But it's 'way back in the inner chamber and— Good Lord!

He checked himself in dismay.

"There was a stone door or something. I don't know whether it closed or not—I was too scared to look. Maybe it's——"

"Aw, ——!" Dockety snarled his impatience. "What in blazes does it matter? We got flashlights, ain't we? C'm on."

The mouth of the great cave was wide enough to admit light to a considerable depth. What had once been a broad, well-trodden floor was now littered with fallen stalactites. Babson was quick to notice that stalagmite formations were entirely absent, and his early training impelled him to put the question to Templar.

"Must have been," said the more practical engineer briefly, occupied as he was in picking his way between fallen columns after Dockety, who blundered ahead into the growing dimness. "But they must have been cleared away. This place was a meeting-place for the old witch-doctors, or a temple or something. There's queer carvings and gods and things inside. A weird, spooky place. But, my gosh, I hadn't time to examine anything."

The cave widened rather than narrowed as they progressed. A high-vaulted chamber it became, extending away and losing itself in the farther gloom. Dark angles behind protruding crags of its walls opened out into jagged grottos or black passages leading away Heaven knew where.

A hundred wizards might hide in those gloomy fissures and never be found. Templar voiced the warning that possibly an ambush might await them in the dark; that that might have been the object of the cunning old man in sending the golden lure. But Dockety only snarled and plunged on. He was like a questing hound, hot on the scent of far-followed game.

"Well, bear to the right then," Templar called. "The door to the inner chamber is somewhere that side."

They stumbled along in pitch blackness now, and of necessity drew closer together; for flashlight illumination at best throws false perspective and deceptive shadows. Unconsciously, too, they lowered their voices. The black silence of the inner earth was beginning to have its effect on them. Dockety's growling expletives at each fresh hindrance of fallen obstacles died down to low mutterings and exasperated hisses of expelled breath. The cave began to narrow down, and the air was oppressive in its eery stillness.

"It seems to me," Templar ventured uneasily, "that we've come an awful long way. That door ought to have been somewhere before this."

Dockety turned on him with his ready snarl.

"Well, gosh blast yuh, whyn't yuh keep yer eyes open? You've been here before, ain't yuh? Do I gotta run this show all by meself?"

Unconsciously, it seemed, the more aggressive one had assumed the leadership. Templar resented the usurpation as well as the domineering tone; but somehow unconsciously in turn he seemed to feel a queer lack of authority over this expedition after the projection into it of that potent metal that turns things so topsy-turvy. Instead of asserting himself he began to offer an excuse.

"Well, gee whiz, when I was here last I wasn't in any condition to take notes. I tell you, that old man had me scared so I was——"

"Whoo-oo-oo-ie-ee-ee-ee!"

The sudden thing that shrieked at them out of the blackness was answered by the high-pitched scream of King's overwrought nerves as he dropped his flash torch and made a wild plunge to cling to the arm of the nearest man; and his shuddering sobs mingled with the ensuing cluck and gurgle of demoniac laughter.

The instinctive reaction to fear caused them to bunch together and stand frozen, shooting wavering rays in every fearful direction and expecting attack by they didn't know what.

The chill silence that followed was dense, almost a thing tangible.

"What was that?"

It was Dockety's hoarse whisper, forgetting for once to swear.

Since nothing moved. Their frozen pulses began to return to normal and thump in their extremities to recover lost time.

"Bats," hazarded Babson hopefully.

"Devils," said Templar. "The Indians last time swore that the old Inca priests kept them here to eat up intruders."

Dockety believed implicitly in the spiritual power of priests and in a personal devil. But they had to be his own priests; and in foreign spooks he believed not at all—for his priests had told him there weren't any. Beyond that his imagination was unable to go. His courage began to ooze back to him. He was as brave as any other animal. With his courage his normal speech returned to him.

"I'll bet it's a gosh blasted trick o' that lousy sonuva crooked —— ter scare us off. An' if he's pullin' a game to scare us, he's in there somewheres to do it. An' I'm —— well goin' in after him, an' when I ketch him——"

The threat culminated in an oath, and he plunged forward again, shooting his flash beam into the darkness, full of vindictive aggression once more.

The cave closed in rapidly. The walls of both sides could dimly be discerned ahead in the ray of a single torch. They seemed to be smoother, and the stalactite formations seemed to have ceased. Templar called on Dockety to wait.

"Hold on a minute. I think I hear water trickling somewhere. Lemme listen."

They halted and listened to the beating of their own hearts. Though there *was* a drip of water somewhere in front. Then suddenly, almost in their faces—

"Whee-ee-ee-ee-ee!"

Another wild voice shrieked the agony of tortured ghosts, and then chuckled scummy glee at their impulsive bunching together.

It was Babson who laughed, though shakily still.

"Shucks, it's the old cistern trick. We might have known it."

The relief was tinged with irritation at his own obtuseness. Templar was able to laugh weakly with him.

"Sure, that's it. They do the same thing in Borneo in the tabu-groves, only there they use bamboos. If we hadn't been so jumpy, all of us, we'd have thought of it right away."

"What cistern trick?"

Dockety demanded elucidation, thrusting his heavy shoulders and heavier face into the white circle of Templar's torch.

"Tanks in the rock with a float gadget to empty it out with a whoosh when it's full. Same thing as you've got at home. Suction through a smaller hole in the rock or through a reed pipe causes the whistle. Witch-doctors over half the world make their devil talk that way."

Dockety was quite unable to visualize the thing. But he turned eagerly to plunge forward again.

"All righto. Here's where I runs this rat to earth."

"He won't be there. It's automatic. We've got to scout back and find the opening into the inner chamber."

Dockety's singleness of purpose was that of a carnivore engaged in the business of its life—which is hunting prey. Until he found resistance he wasted no time in argument. He about-faced and plunged forward on the back trail.

"C'm on then," was all he growled over his shoulder.

But Templar shouted after him:

"Hey, wait a minute. We've got to find that trickle of water and fill our carbid lights."

Dockety growled bearishly at the delay. But he retraced his steps and permitted his lamp to be filled morosely as though granting a favor, and grumbling at Templar the while for not having kept his eyes open.

Templar let it pass. He was busily anxious, speculating on reasons and motives.

"Those tooters don't run forever," he said to Babson, as being the only one who could offer any intelligent advice. "They'd wear out or choke up. There must be a plug or a cork or something that the wizard pulls out when he wants to work the devil-devil. Now why'd he want to pull that silly trick on us? I give him credit for more cleverness than to imagine we'd be scared clean away. What's back of it?"

Dockety allowed Babson no time to theorize. He was fretting over the delay as it was.

"Aw, ——, what's it matter?" he jeered with pointed insult. "What you lice gettin' cold feet about? C'm on. Do I gotta git this boid all be meself?"

Templar's irritation at the overbearing manner was reaching a climax. His fists slowly began to clench as the sting went home. He looked at Babson's face, clear and white in the glare from his own head-light. Hot resentment was there too; but Babson was not a physical type. He could do nothing to avenge insult; and for that reason was all the more prone to nurse an ingrowing anger. Templar felt constrained to let the thing pass once more.

"Oh, all right. Go ahead," he said shortly and let Dockety take the lead.

Perhaps it was just that that the shrewd old wizard was playing for. Perhaps Templar was not giving him credit enough for an uncanny cleverness in playing upon the raw edges of jangled nerves and losing no smallest chance of rasping them just a little bit more.

At all events, whether by accident or design, the effect was surely there, and growing apace. Templar and Babson followed in morose silence. King stumbled along, physically miserable to the point of peevish desperation.

And then, on the top of all the dissatisfaction, came the climax of the door. They found it easily enough with their brilliant carbid head-lights; but they found with it another frenzied delay.

The living rock wall had been hewn down to the form of a massive gateway, upon the lintel and the frames of which were carved in bold relief the emblems of the disk and the square and the serpent; and in the gateway was set the door, fitted with all the accurate skill of the old Inca labor.

And the door was a single great block of stone.

"*Aargh!*"

Dockety shouted a throaty snarl as he threw his weight against it and looked for a handle or a key-hole or something.

"How in —— does this accursed thing open?"

And he kicked at it savagely—and

squealed his immediate rage again and pain as he cast about rapidly for something to hit it with.

With a growling oath he snatched up a block of fallen stalactite and smashed it against the obstructing face. It did not even sound hollow. Massive and square and immune it stood, fitted like the everlasting walls of ancient Cuzco, so closely that the blade of a knife could scarcely be inserted between it and the solid wall of which it was almost a part.

"There must be a lever or a counterweight or something somewhere," Templar suggested with quick anxiety. "If only we can find it! Scout around."

So they scouted, diligently and with such patience as they could control. But the lever or whatever it might have been had been constructed by the cleverest stoneworkers that the world has known, and it had not been intended in that constructing that it should be found by the uninitiated.

Dockety whined a continuous stream of blasphemy and tore at the thing with his nails. The rocks that he hurled at it formed a little pile at its base.

"How thick is this blasted thing?" he shouted at Templar at last.

Templar caught the inference. He was beginning to be affected by the other's crazy impatience.

"See here, fellows, there's another way down," he told them. "There's a fissure out near the mouth of this condemned cave; and that opens up into a crack, and then a chimney. It comes out a little above the lake. It's a stiff climb; but I made it once before. I think maybe Dockety can make it too; so——"

"Say!" Dockety flared out at him. "If youse kin do it I kin. But I ain't gonna. See? I'm gonna set right here an see that this son uva mutt don't git outa here with my billion-dollar mine. Yuh beat it on down an' fetch up a bunch o' sticks, an' we'll blow this blasted thing clean outen the other end o' ——."

SO TEMPLAR left them to snarl at one another and made his way down the fissure he spoke of. It was a long, thin crack where the cliff face was preparing some day to peel off and thunder down into the ravine. A stiff climb, as he had said, and quite impossible for the two weaker members; probably also for Dockety, who was heavy and whose muscles had grown flabby during his recent years of easy living; which was the reason why Templar had not suggested that route in the first instance. But for an active man the descent was not too dangerous.

The long crack—like a giant knife-cut that had not completed the slice—was partially filled with rubble. It was at the lower end that the knife-cut had reached bottom and formed the chimney. By pressing one's back against one face and one's feet into little ledges and niches in the other which had obviously been cut for that purpose long ago, it was quite possible to reach the ravine in half an hour.

Templar reached the camp safely in spite of the excited hurry with which he negotiated the chimney. His first thought was to satisfy his original suspicion about the possible object of the sending of that golden lure which had so effectively cleared the camp of defenders. But everything was exactly as it has been left. Nobody had been there. No little animal had nosed about the cook-tent—there were no little animals.

The silence and desolation of the place caught at Templar's imagination and almost frightened him. He shivered. The worst camp he had known. Worse by far than he had expected when he had told that to his crew.

A malignant influence surely haunted the place. Never had he worked with any group of men who had so consistently shirked. Never had he seen nerves frazzle out so completely under the influence of physical discomforts. It was true, he had never known any other camp where the cold was so terribly persistent, or that was quite so barren and desolate, or where the food had been so impossible. But even so, he could not understand—he was more phlegmatic himself—why those other less evenly balanced ones should have gone to pieces so easily; so out of hand that there remained no authority but that of force.

Instinctively he looked up to the wizard's rock, almost as if expecting to see some visible evidence of the influence which he felt sure came from there. But the painted outpost was as desolate as the sacred—or was it accursed?—ravine itself.

He shivered again and made haste to gather up a dozen sticks of dynamite with a box of percussion caps and the necessary fuse—and as an afterthought a couple of hand drills and single-jack hammers, with a pair of steel-tipped levers and a coil of line.

Then he scrambled back up the water-course with a haste as if something might be clutching at his heels. Nor did his uneasiness leave him till he was once more at the foot of the deep crack that grinned menacingly down upon the ravine which it would one day smother beneath itself.

He tied his bundle of tools to one end of the line and fastened the other to his belt, and tackled the long ascent without delay. It was in point of fact easier than the descent—since he could see the niches and cracks before his face—but it was much harder on the lungs. On the ledge which marked the top of the chimney he lay and rested till his breath came easily again. Then he pulled the bundle up and swung it on his back. Fifteen minutes later he rejoined the others.

Without wasting time in futile questions as to whether everything was all right he marked out the points in the door face where he proposed to plant his charges and forthwith attacked one of them himself.

"There's a job for one of you fellows," he said shortly.

For the first time since the expedition had started Dockety did not hang back to see whether somebody else would not offer to take on the job.

"Gimme," he growled, and snatched up the other drill and hammer; and for the first time he worked to the best of his ability.

He was inexpert and clumsy with the tools; but he had strength, and he employed it with a savage grunt to each stroke.

Time sped on, and Dockety only grunted the harder, though his hammer arm must have ached frightfully. Babson's offer to take a spell was refused with an insulting jeer at his slender frame. King merely sat about and whined that it was long past the lunch hour. Templar curtly ordered him to shut up.

"Guess five shots will do," he said to Dockety. "Keep it up, old-timer."

Dockety's reply was only his habitual snarl. He worked with the frenzied energy of a terrier at a rat-hole, desperate lest the rat escape before the hole should be large enough. Templar's experience was much the greater; yet he finished drilling only three holes to the other's two.

At long last the five were completed. Templar planted his charges with critical care and stood with match ready to light the fuses.

"We'd better get clear out of the cave," he warned, "because stalactites are liable to fall with the explosion."

"But, I'll be gol durned if I do," swore Dockety. "What, git out an' give that boid a chancet to escape? Not by a—— sight. I sticks right where I kin keep my eye on the hole."

And he did.

The explosion roared and thundered through the cave in rolling billows of sound which spread and diffused, and then came pressing back as if projected independently by the walls and ceilings. From distant passages echoes crackled back with startling reports as loud as the crash of falling stalactites, which in turn started the echoes off again.

A careful labor contractor would have forbidden entry for full fifteen minutes for fear of loosened masses of lime formation being jarred free by the mere vibration of footsteps. But the three rushed in before even the first wave of echoes reached them, and found Dockety crouching like a baseball catcher before a jagged hole through which filtered a dim light.

His little eyes were gleaming with avid excitement, and Templar noticed for the first time that his long upper lip was as mobile as an ape's.

"He's in there," he whispered—as if precaution were necessary after that explosion. "I kin see a light."

He cast a hurried glance over his shoulder and then started to crawl through the opening.

"Maybe he's waiting there with a gang or a club or something?" suggested Babson.

But, "Aw, ——!" was all the muffled derision that came back from the hole.

Dockety's legs followed his shoulders in an entirely natural manner. There was no sound resembling a dull thud followed by the rapid disappearance of his limbs. His voice spat profanity from within quite up to the normal. The others scrambled through after him without mishap to their heads as they came through the hole. No gang confronted them with upraised clubs or spears.

In fact, nobody confronted them at all.

The dim light was daylight. High up on their right-hand side as they stood with their backs to the door, blinking astonishment, was a crevice in the chamber wall, through which a thin shaft of sunlight streamed and formed an oval patch on the floor.

By its radiation they could distinguish, directly opposite to them, the tall stone gods which towered up into the dimness. Behind these, carved deep in the rock face, the symbol of the sun, the disk with the radiating wavy lines, cut with extraordinary craft and polished so that the utmost possible light reflected from its thousand facets. The thing caught up the beams of their acetylene head-lights and seemed to glow with uncanny radiance; so that the stone gods stood out against it, black and towering and menacing.

Stone seats hewn out of the rock face and carved with queer figures ran the length of the chamber as far as they could see. Away to the gloomy right, from the direction of the source of the light—which meant in the direction of the cliff face—came the sound of rushing water. To the left the chamber stretched away as vast and as irregular as the outer cave, and as full of deep hiding-places.

Vast and solemn and empty it stood, with the added touch of menace imparted by the great stone gods. Those persons are few who do not experience a sense of creepy awe at entering an ancient and deserted place of worship; the impression of haunting ghosts is irresistible.

But Dockety felt none of these things any more than would a jaguar of the lower plains. He leaped in the air and stamped both feet on the ground together in his fury and shook his clenched fists above his head and cursed through gritted teeth. The additional check left him with no more control over his temper than that same jaguar.

But his fury had to pass. That kind of spasm could not last. Sheer exhaustion brought him to a pause, and he stood breathing stertorously. If he could have laid hands on the old man at that moment neither age nor decrepitude would have protected him from hideous violence. His unbridled rage gave him authority.

"We're goin' ter search every gosh-blasted hole in this here cave," he announced. "We'll separate an' take 'em systematic. An' you, Tom King, you're no blamed good f'r anythin' else, you'll set here an' watch this door, an' if yuh see 'm, yell."

King was ill-advised enough to demur that he did not want to be left alone while the others searched. Dockety leaped at him with the roar of a charging cougar and shook him by the throat till his head lolled limp.

"Yuh poor gosh-blasted louse, ye'll stay where ye're darn well told. An' if yuh quit an' he gits by, I'll tear the guts outa yuh with me two hands. Now git that."

He left King in a chattering heap by the door and strode off into the upper gloom, calling curtly to Templar to take the lower end and ordering Babson to go with himself. Neither felt like inviting a similar exhibition of savagery upon themselves, and they obeyed—though Templar, for one, burned with hot indignation.

* * *

IT WAS hours later when Templar and Babson met again in the same place, both dispirited and sullen.

"There's miles of twisty passages leading into the middle of the world," said the former. "We could grow old looking for him; and then I believe he'd outlive us. Take it from me, Babson, that old man is hardly human."

Babson sat down without a word and buried his head between his knees. He was very tired. Presently he lifted his head and suggested sourly that King might as well do some searching if he wanted to earn a share in the hoped-for wealth. To which pleasant thought there was no answer.

Truly was that shrewd old wizard hardly human in his wisdom.

A far bellowing for help roused them from their dangerous introspection. Templar shrugged sullenly and rose to his feet without enthusiasm.

"I'll bet a hat I know what's the matter. That —— fool has just carried on like a gorilla till his light's gone out on him, and now he's stuck. Do him good to leave him."

But he relighted his lamp and went to the rescue; and found it exactly as he had guessed. The carbid in Dockety's lamp was exhausted, and he had dropped his flash torch in his impetuous haste and smashed as well as lost it. His first thanks to his rescuer was—

"Why in —— didn't yuh tell me 't these blank-blasted things didn't run no more'n an hour?"

Templar led him back to the light—which was slanting very pale now through the far crevice. He was too dispirited to argue; and he slumped down on a stone seat. But Dockety's energy in pursuit of the wealth which he already considered his was astounding. His shirt was torn; his knees were scraped; his face haggard from the wearing force of his own passions and streaked with grime; a thin trickle of dried blood clung to his forehead where he had bumped it in the dark. But he called loudly for the carbid can and proceeded to replenish his lamp.

"Oh, gee, what's the use?" Templar remonstrated. "There's a million passages and back alleys, and this guy has lived here for a hundred years. He could dodge us forever. But I've got an idea that'll fetch him—if he hasn't beaten it already. I'm thinking maybe he up and quit yesterday when he saw that he had killed Marty."

The thought struck Dockety like a blow. He stood, feet wide apart, arms hanging from loose shoulders, head thrust forward, while his face went the whole gamut of evil emotions—from its existing high tension of avarice with its wide eyes and twitching nostrils, through loose-lipped incredulity while the dull mind battled with a new and unwelcome idea; back to the dominant one of twisted, heavy-jowled rage.

"Y-Yuh—yuh!" he stuttered, advancing on Templar with hands curling and uncurling like talons, while he tried to set his tongue to some epithet which would do justice to the occasion. "Yuh— Blast yuh! 'F yuh'd 'a' come yest'day right away when I wanted 'stead o' pullin' the movin'-pitcher hero stuff 'bout plantin' out a stiff that wouldn't give a —— one way or t'other, we'd a got him."

Templar remained sitting as he was. He was too dispirited to quarrel; and since, even in the case of so bellicose a person as Dockety, it takes two to make a fight, conflict was averted.

"For Pete's sake, shut up!" he snapped. "It was as much your fault as mine. If you hadn't raised objections we'd have got a start anyhow. So cut out that line of stuff. Now if you fellows want to listen to the idea I've been chewing on for the last hour or so, shut up and listen.

"It's this: Down there is the underground stream that's keeping the lake full; and there's the busted dam. I've just been looking it over. It isn't much of a job; there's all the stone blocks lying right to hand. Well, let's fix up the dam. That'll mean that with this inflow cut off and our siphon working, the lake is going to keep emptying out. Getting closer to that treasure, see? Now, if the old man hasn't quit the country he'll sure come along some time or other to gum the works. So two of us can watch up here and the other two can guard camp, and we'll get him both ways—and if we don't, anyway we'll get the other stuff."

King and Babson grasped the strategy at once. The only fear they expressed was as to who would have to keep guard in that awful cave. Dockety was slower to assimilate the idea, standing with loose lip and vacant stare as it soaked in. Then he gave as much grudging acquiescence as he was capable of.

"Say, bo, that's the foist wise thing yuh said since I known yuh. I ain't scared o' stayin' here; an' I don't care who watches with me neither—even if it's King."

A cunning gleam began to come into his eyes as an idea of his own grew; and he proceeded to endorse the plan with enthusiasm. If the party were divided up into two, he began to see; and if he should be one of the two who might catch the wizard and wring the knowledge of the fabulous mine from him, why then what need that the other two should ever know anything about it at all? A half-share was just twice as much as a quarter-share. And the probability was that the wizard would come to wreck the repaired dam.

Cunning, once given a start, multiplies itself apace. So Dockety restated his assertion under the camouflage of braggadocio. He wasn't afraid of staying in that cave a week. And since a good man would be needed at the other end too, let Templar guard his —— old pipe-line, and let him have King here. He was an old friend of Tommy King's, and they'd get on splendidly together.

For just a moment the horrible thought assailed him: What if the wizard should be caught at the camp? But he dismissed it in the next instant. With Templar there it would be all right; the poor fool would probably play straight—though that again might mean a fifth share for old man King. Still——

"Well, all right then, youse guys, let's get a move on an' fix them sluiceways," he bellowed with boisterous cordiality and a resumption of his energy. "The sooner the better, I says. C'm on, Mr. Engineer, an' show us the works."

Templar scrambled through the shattered doorway and brought back with him the steel-tipped levers which they had left outside in the hurry of their eager entry. With a short warning as to the need of precaution against slipping he led the way.

At the far end of the cave, parallel to where they knew the cliff face must be, ran a swift stream. From a black fissure to the left it came, and followed the same great cleft through to the right. A clammy path of roughly cut steps followed it. Within some seventy yards or so the stream suddenly disappeared.

Their lights showed them buttresses of square-hewn stone against which the dark water swirled and piled up on itself before converging to the middle and plunging with an oily *schloop* through a space of some five feet. From there it glided in a silent, continuous toboggan slide down a long, steep chute that lost itself in the black depths. From far below somewhere the muffled roar of subterranean waters came up to them.

"That's what comes up in the bottom of our lake somewhere," Templar told them. "Here are the blocks that used to be in the center of the dam before the old man pulled them out—though how he managed to handle them is a miracle. When we've put 'em back the water will run along this artificial channel and follow the fissure down to the right wherever the old Inca engineers wanted it to go when they built it."

An awesome place it was, as Templar recollected with a shudder, for a man alone in the black bowels of the earth. But for four white men together, well supplied with lights, there was no mystery; nor, as he had said, much of a job.

The blocks that had been hastily taken from the center of the little dam had been merely tossed to the right to fill up the channel. A reversal of the process was all that was required.

Though it was not without danger; for the surface on which they stood was smooth rock, scummy with the undried spray of ages; and a misstep or a slip would have meant one swift, awful swoop into the bottom of nowhere.

"Right here," Templar told the others, "is where the old wizard somehow managed to slide that other white man. So watch your step."

The warning was scarcely necessary. The place held sufficient suggestion of dread in itself to urge the very extremity of care. King and Babson, as a matter of fact, shuddered at sight of that swirling, swift current, and all they would do was to lever the blocks of stone to the edge of the dam and leave them there for the other two who had the stronger nerves to work into place, thereby giving Dockety the splendid satisfaction of jeering to his heart's content at their pusillanimity.

But it was done at last, and without mishap. The long, black chute was dry. The stream boiled up against the rebuilt dam and surged round into the artificial channel, to disappear into some other far fissure that the ancient Inca engineers had found a use for.

Somewhere out and far down Templar knew that his siphon was emptying out the lake at the rate of five thousand gallons per minute. And he knew that the wizard would know it too, very shortly if not already; and then, if he still existed, he would surely be lured to one of the two places to do his feeble utmost to protect the sacred trust of his fathers.

And then they discovered that they were very weary men indeed. Stiffly they made their way back to the lighted shrine of the stone gods—and found that the light was gone from the cleft in the roof. A series of disquieting realizations began to break upon their weary souls.

It was night. They could never get back to camp in the darkness. They were hungry—famished with the ache of dyspeptic stomachs. They were wet. It was cold—gosh, how clammily cold! They had no change of raiment. No blankets. *No fire!*

And the only offset to all these chill discomforts was cold sardines!

Their faces supplied a study of emotions. Sheer, stark misery on King's. Fear, imaginings of sickness, on Babson's. The apathy of utter weariness—he had climbed most—on Templar's. Furtive consideration of self-protection at the expense of everything else on Dockety's.

Gradually all the expressions merged into one—the fretful ill temper of cold, tired, hungry men. A word, a look or a gesture would have been a spark sufficient to flare up into a savage quarrel—and each man knew it—and nobody cared very much. Their nerves were on the extreme edge of hysterical explosion, careless of results. And there was but one saving factor. And that was that they were too tired to fight.

Templar had long ago given up hope of controlling his crew in amity together. In fact, since the arrival in their midst of that death-dealing mass of the metal that has the power to make men mad, he had hardly been able to regard them as his crew any longer. Their condition had by some invisible transition grown to be that of four individuals who had nothing in common to band them together except a mutual dependence on one another for the achievement of a common gain—and some of them were not so very necessary at that. They had reached the point—which other people who have hunted that same metal have known—of each man for himself.

Templar smiled a smile that was twisted and grim.

"Well, fellows," he said wearily, "I don't know what you're going to do. It doesn't seem to be up to me to make arrangements any more anyway. But I've got to have some sleep. When I freeze I'll get up and run about. If any one of you knows a better hole, hop to it."

King was beset with anxious fears.

"What about keeping watch? What if the old man comes and murders us in our sleep?"

Dockety's reaction was the exact opposite.

"What if the son of a mutt was to creep outa the door?"

"I don't know," said Templar. "And I don't care. If anybody wants to watch, let him. If he'll wake me in a few hours, I'll take a spell—I'll be frozen enough to be awake anyhow. But right now I'm dead."

And with that he stretched himself out on a stone bench. He was the only one who was willing to own up to it that he was too weary of body and soul to care about consequences. The others were just as weary, or more so. And so it happened that presently, in spite of the cold and the wet and appalling discomfort, they all slept somehow in snatches somewhere.

THEY groaned and cursed their several ways back to a numbed consciousness to find a dim light filtering once again through the cleft in the high ceiling. Reflected light; from which they knew it was still morning; for it was the afternoon sun that cast its direct ray upon the floor.

Painfully they stretched and shivered, and peevishly they swore. With motion and the awakening of their sluggish vitality hunger immediately reasserted its presence. Forlorn instinct made them look about their cheerless surroundings in the vain hope of discovering something to eat. Suddenly Babson gripped Templar by the arm.

"My God, what's that?"

He pointed.

With a unanimous nervous start all faces turned in the direction of the tall stone gods.

In the dimness upon the stone coffer between their feet a figure crouched. Shrunken and shapeless and indistinguishable except for a pair of extraordinarily bright eyes that seemed to glow with internal fire while they regarded the group with motionless impassivity.

"By goshalmighty, it's him!" Dockety shouted.

All his rabid desire was instantly to the fore; and he rushed to lay hands on the ghostly bundle before it should suddenly vanish into the surrounding shadows.

But like a hound that charges with loud outcry upon a coldly confident cat which refuses to budge, something in the chilly glitter of those uncanny eyes restrained him. His impetuous rush slowed up, and his eager, clutching hands dropped to his sides, and he remained standing in foolish indecision a few feet distant. The others came up and joined him in a respectful half-circle. It was like a monarch giving audience.

Then the ancient wizard performed a miracle.

"*Buenas dias, señores,*" he said in Spanish.

That was something nobody had thought about in their frantic rush to capture the old man and extort the knowledge they so avidly desired. How would they have communicated? Templar knew Spanish; and Babson had picked up a working knowledge of the same during the desultory practise of his profession. But it was surely miraculous that the old hermit had lived through some far chapter of his life in which he had acquired a knowledge of the tongue.

They stood in foolish silence, nobody knowing just what to say; till Dockety's dominant urge took the form of—

"Ask him what he wants."

All his intemperate resolutions of the day before had melted down to that. He had come raging, filled with the savage determination of laying down the law of what *he* wanted. And now the best he could produce was a husky whisper of—

"Ask him what he wants."

The bald dome of the withered head was faintly visible against the darker background of rock. The crimson poncho merged into it. Only the eyes glowed out of the dimness; and from somewhere below them the voice came again. It seemed to have understood, or at least to have expected, the question.

"The white men have a writing which tells of the treasure in the sacred lake. They have come with the white men's magics and have builded a tube which sucks the water out of the lake. They have come with their youth and their strength and have closed the way of the underground water. The magic of the white men is greater than my poor magic, and their strength is greater than my strength, who am old; alas, very feeble and very old."

Templar's heart leaped. That much then at least was sure. There *was* a treasure in the lake. But quick suspicion followed after. What was it that the old man wanted? Why was he apparently willing to capitulate, when he might comfortably have murdered them—or at all events, some of them—in their sleep?

"What's he say? What's he talkin' about? Blast yuh, why dontcha tell us?"

Dockety's insistent clamor was at his ear, working himself up to a frenzy of suspicion that vital information was being withheld.

"Shut up," Templar told him testily. "I'm finding out."

And he found his tongue at last to answer the old man.

"Even so it is, wizard. But why have you made resistance? Why may we not by virtue of our magics take that treasure that lies unused? Why should the wizard fight with the white men? It is our desire to be at peace. We bring gifts. Look, I will show."

The voice lost some of its passionless monotony, though the dim heap remained motionless still. It was a bitter cry from the depths of a dejected soul

"What are your gifts, white man, to me who have failed in my old age to keep the trust that my fathers handed down to me? Faithfully have I wrought to keep that trust; but, alas, I am old. I am old and my strength has gone from me. The treasure that I have failed to guard will be taken by the white men; the gold that my fathers cursed."

The cracked old voice assumed the rhythm of a chant, a prescribed litany of his faith.

"Accursed is the gold for all time; as my fathers cursed it when it came to pay the ransom of that holy one whom the white men slew for its sake. For the sake of gold did they slay the holy one, the last of the Inca stock. For the sake of gold did they ravish the land. For the sake of gold are my people a forgotten legend. Therefore is the gold accursed. Therefore—" sudden determination fired the frail accents, and the eyes glowed with the menace of lusty youth— "never must the white men find the gold. Nor will they ever find it."

Templar was half-mesmerized by the jeremiad chant, and then suddenly taken aback at the change of tone.

"Gee whiz!" he murmured. "Gee whiz!"

And he ran his fingers with nervous hesitation through his hair. But antagonism began to grow in response to the threat of foreordained failure.

"Well, *dientro, viejo,* what's to prevent us going ahead and taking it, now that the magic machinery is all working?"

Weary resignation was in the old man's voice.

"Lord Sun has sent a message, and his servant obeys. In exchange for that writing, says the Lord Sun, must I show the place, the mother of the gold that was coming as a part of the price of that holy one's life."

"Whoop! Whee-ee!" came a simultaneous yell from both Templar and Babson. "He's going to show us the mine!"

And in their hysterical elation they shook hands exultantly all round; even with Dockety, their smoldering hate for the moment forgotten. The latter had to express his glee more boisterously. He thumped King, good old pal Tommy, in the back, and gave vent to incoherent bellows while he seized Babson to force him round in an ungainly dance.

The old man sat motionless and regarded these antics of the superior white men with impassive silence, though perhaps—in the prevailing dimness it was not possible to see the deep furrows of the parchment face—there was some expression, possibly in the eyes, of a cold, passionless amusement.

Templar, in spite of his wild elation, was assailed again by swift suspicion—he had more than a considerable respect for the old wizard's cunning. His decision to pit his wits against the old man's in adroit cross-examination was instant.

"But, wizard, tell me. If the gold is indeed accursed and never to be found by the white men, why then are you willing to show us many times more gold than is in the lake? Is not that other also a trust?"

The old man's answer was a simple and direct statement of his abiding faith.

"Lord Sun has sent the message, and I have spoken with the spirits of the wise ones who were before me. The matter is beyond my hands—which are old and feeble. Lord Sun will protect his own from the white men."

Templar translated the oracle. The others laughed in careless amusement. Dockety growled:

"Huh! 'F that's all that's stoppin' us I ain't worryin' none. But yuh tell the old monkey if he tries to pull any monkeyshines I'll take an' handle him like he won't fergit. An', hey, ask him if there's plenty of it."

Templar felt that the old man was antagonistic enough; that he was doing what he did only as some mysterious sort of duty which he hated. There was nothing to be gained by antagonizing him further. He translated only the last.

"It is as a bone in the teeth of the mountain, white man. Far up in the mountain called Chocque Chullunkaya, the Golden Snow, though the reason for the name has been forgotten. It is a long journey, and I am old. When the Lord Sun stands in the middle of his heaven we start from here. Ask no more. I must make preparation. I am old and very feeble."

He withdrew into his poncho and remained a mute, shapeless bundle.

"Golly!" Templar reported in an awe-stricken voice. "There must be an outcrop of the vein right in sight."

He would not have been human if he could have kept his mind from racing away into a brilliant future of automobiles and mansions and servants. A dozen pictures formed and faded in his wildly careering brain in the fractional space of time before Dockety demanded explanation of the technical phrase.

"What 'zat mean in dollars?"

"Lord knows!" Templar replied. "Anything you can think of. If the vein is as rich as the sample, and if there's anything of it at all, you can figure a billion easy."

Dockety had no very accurate conception of what a billion was. But he knew it meant a vast sum of money. He guffawed and went into *his* dreams of affluence. Only his were verbal.

"Gee," he gloated. "Gee! One-quarter of a billion plunks! Watch me knock 'em cold in Luigi's with me layout! Me with a brace o' swell Janes an' the sky bein' the limit. Me, presidin' over the political club; district leader with a coupla dozen cops on me payroll. Me, with the biggest dimond in me shoit in Broadway. Say, fellers, with a quarter share of a billion berries you'll think I was the fire department comin' along."

"A *fifth* share," Templar cut in coldly on his rhapsody.

Instantly the other bristled, and his voice changed from the coarse gloating to the loud intimidative. Almost in the dim light did he bulk huge and hairy.

"Say now, bo. Yuh cut that line right out. Old man King ain't got nothin' to do with this here mine, and he don't get no cut-in. How about it, Tommy? Whadda yuh say? Yer uncle ain't done nothin' to help us on this deal."

Tommy King would have been foolhardy indeed to gainsay that commanding appeal. And in any case the gross god of avarice had already fired him with drunken dreams. He was perfectly willing to double-cross his uncle—nor would it be the first time. Backed by Dockety, he felt brave enough to raise his voice in angry assertion of his rights.

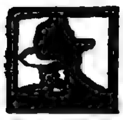
"Quarter-share, sure. How d'you get that way, Templar? If you want to make the old man a present, you can stay behind and give him the whole blamed lake; that's what he paid for. But we aren't going to give up our legitimate findings."

"There y' are. See? That's how we all thinks."

Dockety shouted his triumph. Then his voice rose louder and more menacing as he advanced upon Templar.

"Now git this straight, young fella.

There ain't yuh nor no other ——— ——— son of a weak-livered mutt gonna do me outa my share o' my own findin's. Now whadda yuh say?"



THE psychology of authority is a queer thing. Templar, vested with authority as leader of the expedition, would have fought to maintain his dominion. Now as a single unit in a disorganized gang—which was what they had sunk to—and with the majority opinion against him, he shrank from conflict with the more belligerent animal over a question of ethics which—it seemed more and more as the fabulous wealth grew more tangible—was not so very important after all. In fact this shrinking from assertion of himself was what he had been doing all through the previous day.

"Oh, for Pete's sake, don't let's argue," he growled. "We've got other things to do. We've got to get down to camp and fetch grub and blankets and what-not. If we're going to start at midday we haven't time to scrap about anything. Time enough to argue about division when we begin to get the stuff out. So what's the use of scrapping now?"

Dockety was quick to grasp his usurped domination.

"Yeah, yuh better say that," he growled with derisive complacency. "There ain't no use o' scrappin' with me, buddy, an' don't yuh fergit it neither. And what's more, if there's any orders given around here it's me that's givin' 'em. Git that."

Templar, having permitted his spirit to submit to the first challenge, was inevitably started on the swift road to subjection. It would require a considerable effort of will to rouse himself to that self-conception of equality which would entail struggle for mastery. He burned hot with shame for his own weakness; but he left the triumph to Dockety—temporarily at all events. He rose to his feet to cover his confusion and announced:

"Well, I'm going down to camp by the short cut—that's all there's time for; and somebody's got to come with me"—aimed at Dockety with an attempt at self-assertion. "I've got to fetch that chart that he wants and grub and blankets and stuff, and I can't carry all that stuff up alone."

Dockety got it all right.

"Huh? S'pose yuh mean me, yeah? Well, there ain't no gotta. But I'll come, 'cause these poor lice can't make it.

"An' listen, youse two. Ye'll set right here an' see 't the old man don't git away. 'F he ain't here when we gits back, youse hadn't better be neither."

Already he was showing his domination. The two said no word. Their thoughts were their own, and the blacker for repression. Templar was already crawling through the hole in the door. Dockety looked round once, swelled his shoulders and chest in emphasis and lumbered after him, actually looking as he felt—twice as large as he had been.

His demeanor during the stiff descent was more grossly domineering than ever. For it began to be forced on his perception that Templar was in much the better physical condition. His own breath was coming in painful gasps while the latter was in no particular distress.

In the camp he became insufferable. His crude tendency was to hold ascendency and display authority by mere volume of words. His tone was loud and bullying. He couched his conversation in the form of orders. He entered violent controversies against every article that Templar selected—and Templar stood it all with short answers and a hardening of the face and a squaring of the shoulders. Much too dense was Dockety to understand that there was a point beyond which a man whose spirit had not been entirely broken could not be driven.

The ascent was a further revelation to him, amounting to a shock. He decided to negotiate the chimney first, Templar below him. He found himself painfully winded at sixty feet; and there was fully half that distance to go yet before he could swing himself over the ledge that offered comparative safety. His back began to grow limp and his legs wabbled with the strain of the upthrust. There came an occasion when one foot, pushing unsteadily against the shallow niches, found no hold, and the weight of his body, sustained only by the other and by thrusting his back against the opposite face of the chimney, became too much for his muscles. He began to sink, clawing at the cliff face before him till Templar from below was able to find his free foot and thrust it securely into a hold.

Dockety began to realize the unstable foundation of his domination. He reached the ledge finally and lay loose-lipped and panting, utterly played out. A growing fear was in his eyes; and with its grew the extreme cunning of desperation.

He lay in the direct path and panted, affecting to be unable to move, while he kept Templar in the strained position of sitting on nothing. This was strategy. When at last he rolled over and left room for Templar to scramble up, he lay and panted loudly still and let Templar pull up the heavy load of gear. No sooner was it up, and Templar panting now from his exertions, than Dockety rose to his feet with alacrity and made his way along the ledge to where it merged into the deep crack in the cliff face.

Here he turned. His time was ripe and his opportunity to establish his ascendency once and for all was at hand. He stood on higher ground than Templar, in a more favorable position, and the latter had had no opportunity for rest. His face assumed the brutal expression of intimidation as he faced the other.

"See here, bo," he growled. "Yuh been pretty fresh down there in the camp; and I figure the time has come fer a showdown. We might 's well settle it right here an' now as any other time. Now, what about them shares? Four or five?"

"Five," snapped Templar without a second's hesitation.

"Yeah? I don't think. Now listen, yuh poor son of a gun. What I'm tellin' yuh goes."

He added a string of the invectives that no man may accept.

Templar's spirit had been schooling itself during the last smoldering hour to a reassertion of its lost self-respect. The flash point had been reached. Dockety's jaw was thrust invitingly forward; and Templar was deluded in his access of fury into swinging for it with all his force.

It was what Dockety had played for. His ready arm parried the blow and his equally ready fist smashed a counter into Templar's forehead. Then he closed. The advantage was all his. He was rested, and the slope added to his weight. Templar was borne backward, his spine bent at an excruciating angle. There was hardly space enough in that narrow cleft to turn the tables, even if he had had the strength.

He fought back with desperate pluck, and an occasional half-arm jolt found the savage face which gritted down so close above his own.

But the blows were ineffectual—the position was too strained—and they served only to rouse the fighting animal in his opponent to that state of insensate fury where thought ceases and the only conscious desire is the savage impulse to rend, to tear, to gouge.

He battered Templar's face. He used the foul trick of the knee. He dashed the other's body or head, as opportunity offered, against the rock wall. Anything to inflict hurt.

He felt his opponent begin to sag, and he knew that the crafty victory was his. He was exhausted enough with his own vicious efforts to feel the need of a respite. He threw the limp figure from him, therefore, with a last triumphant grunt of:

"There, that'll teach yuh. Ye lousy son of a mutt! I'll show yuh who's boss around here."

Templar reeled back from the thrust, dazed and staggering. Back he lurched, and back. In the scuffle they had come very near to the ledge—perhaps that was strategy too. There were not more than four or five paces to go altogether.

Templar, dizzy, limp, and reeling, went!

DOCKETY caught at his breath. His heart pounded in his head as he steadied himself against the rock wall and stared at the empty place where the other had been. Horror was in his eyes. The deadly fear that comes to a man who has killed. But presently as his breath came more regularly thought began to return; and with thought, a comforting reflection that they had come where policemen were not. Horror began to be tinged with satisfaction; and satisfaction in turn with a growing greed. Slowly he went to the edge and knelt to look down. Ninety feet it was to the bottom, and the tumbled rocks were jagged.

He rose and collected up the bundle of gear. A twisted grin was on his loose lips, and in his little eyes was only greed, full-grown and unrepentant. A one-third share, after all, was considerably better than a fifth.

He swung the bundles on to his back and scrambled on up the cleft to rejoin the wizard who would show him a vast store of that metal which has the power to make men mad, and of which one-third was his.

THIS truculence as he entered the inner chamber was repellent of questioning.

"Gee!" King told him with relief. "We thought you were never coming. The old man's fussing to get started. He says it's a long hike."

"Well, I'm here now, ain't I?" Dockety snarled back at him. "I'm ready. 'F you're in such a blasted hurry, y' kin eat as we go along. I ain't keepin' nobody waitin'."

King subsided into sulky repression. But Babson asked him with a sly satisfaction:

"Who hit you in the eye and cut up your face like that? And where's Templar?"

Dockety slouched close up to him and thrust his face within a foot of the other's.

"Templar's gonna guard camp 'cause I told him to. Now 's there anythin' else yuh wanna know?"

Babson's eyes fell, and he moved away. Dockety swaggered up to the wizard, who still crouched between the feet of his gods as if he were a part of the altar vestments.

"All right, old buzzard," he bellowed. "I'm ready. Get a move on an' show us the boodle."

The wizard remained as motionless as the stone upon which he sat. Only the voice came from somewhere near the apex of the huddled heap.

"The writing?"

Babson called the translation sulkily from where he stood.

"Oh, the chart."

Dockety showed confusion.

"Tell 'm Templar stuffed it in 's shoit an' he's got it yet."

The wizard never moved. Only the extraordinarily brilliant eyes which missed no detail of anything gave a sign of life. They bored into the black soul of the bully with piercing keenness for a long minute. Then at last the old man nodded with slow satisfaction, and a wasted claw emerged from under the poncho and beckoned to Babson. He came obediently to the summons. The claw pointed at Dockety's chest.

"Tell him," said the wizard enigmatically, "that the omen is proof that the wisdom of my fathers is a true wisdom. The magic of the golden message that their wisdom taught me to make works as their wisdom prophesied. It is well; for that other one was clever and might have saved you. Now am I satisfied that the Lord Sun will utterly destroy all of you who seek to lay bare his secrets."

"What 'z he say?" growled Dockety.

"Oh, I don't know," grumbled Babson. "He always talks in riddles. Something about all of us going to get sunstroke or something."

Dockety laughed in bearish derision. But speech without a threat was not possible for him. The loud laugh changed to the habitual growl.

"Tell 'm we ain't worryin' about no sunstroke; an' all he's gotta do is don't try no funny business—yeah, an' hurry up. I'm all set."

The blood-red bundle stirred at last. Stiffly and with many cracks of the joint a wasted leg unfolded itself from beneath the poncho and lowered itself to the ground. There was a rest, as if to restore circulation, and then the other leg followed. With the extremity of deliberation the wizard set about his preparations, which were astonishingly simple for the long journey promised.

Out of a dim corner he took an embroidered bag, faded and threadbare and apparently as old as himself. He peered into it and pawed over its contents. Then he nodded with the slow reflection of age.

From another recess he produced an ancient drum and squatted with it between his knees to test its resonance. Light, swift taps with bony fingers which seemed suddenly to be imbued with an extraordinary vitality produced a booming roar which reverberated through the cave. Again the old wizard nodded slow satisfaction. There was an ominously impressive air of inevitable finality about everything the old man did, an absolute conviction that events would come out according to preordained schedule. The dim, uncertain light added a momentous significance to each deliberate action.

Babson felt the uneasy impulse to ask—

"What are all the trappings for, old man?"

The wizard squinted up at him from under hairless brows.

"I do not know, white man," he answered Babson's query. "The matter is outside of my hands—I, who am old and have failed. The wisdom of my fathers which has come down to me tells me how to invoke the Lord

Sun, and the Lord Sun will then surely protect his own. So it is written."

The man's simple faith was appalling. He seemed to have no fear at all now that anything could make any difference. The wisdom of his fathers had told him of the power of gold, and their wisdom had worked true to every detail so far. So would it continue to work according to the forecast.

The white men had the promise of gold, and nothing would now hold them from going after it. To their own terrible cost had his fathers learned that truth, and in dying desperation had they evolved their magic to hide the curse of their country forever. The ancient wizard, therefore, was satisfied in his unshakable conviction. Nothing would stay the swift march of fate.

But Dockety guffawed his confidence.

"Yuh tell 'm, bo. All he's gotta do is show us the mine. 'N' then he kin cuss us out all he likes. 'T won't faze us any with a billion plunks in sight. Tell 'm tuh git a move on."

Babson gave an expurgated translation. The old man slung his implements of magic about his neck and rose to his feet.

"I am ready," he said.

He scuttled out before them and traversed the outer cave like some burrowing rodent trotting in accustomed paths round obstacles, and stood then blinking in the sunlight. In some amazing manner he had known exactly when the sun would be at its zenith. Without a halt he trotted on across the ancient road and on to his rock. There he flung up his arms to greet his god, and stood in full view, a wild augury of impending fate.

It was the first time that any one of the white men had seen him close up in the light, and even Dockety was startled at the extraordinary figure. The yellow, skull-like head was thrown back in rapt adoration. The skeletal arms, stretching from under the ragged poncho, spread it on either side like a pair of great red wings. Below it protruded a pair of baggy pants, torn and fringed at the ends like the leg feathers of an eagle. Below them again, legs thinner than seemed possible even for the shriveled weight above them. The whole gave the impression of some vast and sinister bird about to leap up and wing its way to the god it called upon.

"*Illappa, Illappa,*" the priest sent his wailing cry of supplication to echo among the high crags. "*Illappa*, Lord Sun, thine ancient servant goes to perform thy bidding. *Illappa*, take thou the sacrifice."

Like an ungainly bird he hopped down from his rock, his eyes alight with a queer exaltation. His movements were sure and swift now. With the quick dart of a monkey's paw his hand shot into the embroidered bag and produced a palmful of coca-leaf. With swift-moving, expert fingers of the one hand, for all the world like an exhibition cigaret-roller, he laid the leaves into a neat pack and stuffed the whole load into his mouth. Then he started off up the path at an astonishing speed, calling over his shoulder:

"Make speed, white men, make speed. The way is far, and the sacrifice must be at the time when the Lord Sun plunges from his heaven into the hole behind the mountains."

Babson alone was sensitive to the eery menace implied in the old man's incontrovertible faith in the power of the wizardries which he had culled from the lore of his fathers. He suggested carrying food and blankets. If the journey was six hours up into the everlasting snows, how about return? But Dockety jeered at his nervousness.

"Aw, ——, whatcher fussin' about? 'F this old cripple kin make it, we kin go there an' back on our knees. C'm on or he'll outrun yuh, yuh poor goat."

But the "old cripple" scurried along the path with a tirelessness that covered mile after mile while the white men panted along in the rear. The ancient highway was but the relic of what it had been in the old days of its glory, when long llama trains and a hundred slaves carried the loads of gold that were destined to pay the ransom of the last of the Incas.

In parts the old buttresses had broken away, and it was necessary to scramble down the dizzy mountainside to find a possible crossing, and up again to the goat track that marked where the road had once been. In parts again there was no evidence of trail at all, and the old wizard led them over sharp ridges where the wind cut into their bones, and down rubble-strewn slopes where their loins ached with the strain of holding back. From these, along sheer precipices again.

And ever he mounted. And the higher the white men followed, the harder became the strain on their unaccustomed lungs. To their guide, born in the thin altitudes, nothing seemed to make any difference. Ever he scrambled ahead, and ever he called over his shoulder—

"Hurry, white men, hurry."

PRESENTLY snow began to fleck the bare gravel ridges; and presently no gravel was visible any more. Only vast slopes of snow. Mushy snow, which soaked through their boots and chilled their feet. To Babson came the recurring fear of nightfall and lack of shelter and frozen feet. He remembered the frightful discomfort of the previous night in the cave; and this would be a million times worse. Still, if the old man led them, surely he would need some sort of shelter if return should be impossible. He stilled his misgivings for fear of Dockety's savage derision and plowed on through the wet snow, which was beginning to numb his feet already. Yet the old wizard shuffled on through it with only grass sandals for protection.

On the crest of a long slope Dockety, plunging avidly ahead with no thought in mind except a mountain of gold, slipped on a treacherous something that rolled under the white covering, and would have gone careering down on a miniature avalanche but for Babson's quick rescue. He swore at Babson for thanks.

"Better watch your step here," Babson advised. "This snow is all mush. The Spring sun is strong enough to melt it, and the water seeps through and loosens it all up 'way underneath. Slip here and you'll go a mile."

Dockety swore at him again for his advice, and snarled that he would darn well walk how he liked. But he was more careful. He had need to be; for the snow began to be deep and the slopes ever steeper. His temper reached the savage point at which he found it necessary to swear at the tireless old man and yell to him to stop for a rest. But the wizard pointed to a cleft between the mountains away to his right.

"There, white men," he called back. "Over that pass that is known to none but me. There lies the bone of gold in the teeth of the mountain. Hurry, white men, hurry! The Lord Sun awaits his sacrifice."

With such an incentive even the flagging King acquired a new burst of energy and was able to keep pace with the others. Their lungs tore at their straining chests till each breath was a torture. But they gasped and groaned and kept on. At every hundred yards or so now it was necessary to rest for breath and to relieve the ache in their calves.

The day began to wane. They had good cause to know that the journey was as long as the wizard had said—longer, in fact, for them, whose legs were unused to the mountain slopes and whose lungs were unused to that thin air. Yet no one of them spoke now about the difficulty of return in the dark which would presently be upon them. King, indeed, was assailed by horrible fears; yet he dared say nothing; for if he should not be in at the finish he felt no confidence in either of the companions he had chosen to bring all the way from New York. He felt now that neither of these men whom he had chosen as men whom he could trust would ever give him a share if they could avoid doing so.

So he struggled on with the other two, who struggled on together for the same reason; and all panted and groaned and suffered agonies together—the agonies of bursting lungs and raw nasal passages and freezing feet.

For gold, a mountain of gold to be counted in millions, lured them on.

Clear against the sky-line of the pass the wizard waited for them and shrieked down to them to hurry, for their doom was ready. Even Dockety had no breath to curse back at him.

Yet finally they arrived at the crest of the narrow pass, and sank down, all of them, in the wet snow, almost ready to die. The wizard plucked at their sleeves.

"Look, white men," he cried with a wild note of triumph in his voice. "Look below! There is the place that is known to none but me; that will remain known to none but me. The bone of gold in the teeth of the mountain from which came the ransom of that holy one whom the white men slew. Up, white men. Come down and I will show you that I have spoken true in this matter—as even in the matter of the sacrifice. Speed, white men, speed! The Lord Sun waits low in his heaven."

Babson lay on his stomach with a hand pressed against an agonizing stitch in his right side and gasped. But it was awe, not pain, that put the low, strangled note into his voice.

"My good lord!" he whispered hoarsely. "I—I believe it's all true! That looks like—like gold!"

Beyond the lip of the pass a little bowl-shaped valley opened out, hedged with towering cliffs to left and to right. The sun, slanting low over their left shoulders, glistened blindingly on a long slope of snow; but at its foot, almost in the center of the bowl, was a dark patch where the slope had been undercut and no snow could cling.

Like a giant ski-jumper's take-off came the fleeting thought to Babson; only to be supplanted immediately by the incredible consideration of that dark patch. The white reflection from the vast, steep snow-bank made it difficult to distinguish things clearly; yet the dark face of the patch seemed—it was unbelievable, a miracle—it seemed to be flecked and splashed with yellow.

"Look upon it, white men," the wizard shrilled. "Look upon the lost treasure of the sacred race that is no more. Come down and look clearly and see that my word is true. Speed, white men, speed; for the Lord Sun waits."

He led the way, skirting close under the beetling cliff that towered black and menacing on their left, following what seemed to be a causeway of rough stone steps. This time the white men were able to keep up with him. They outstripped him, in fact, in their eagerness to cover the short half-mile, and they arrived with a rush at the foot of the cutting. There they stood and stared—and gaped—and breathed hard through wide nostrils, and stared again in awed silence.

Babson was the first to put out a trembling forefinger and touch it.

"My lord!" he breathed. "Lord of heaven, it's—it's true! It's the same as the sample. Look—good gosh, they haven't blasted it or split it or anything. It's so rich that they've just cut it out with cold chisel! Friable quartz, and two-thirds gold smeared on like butter!"

Then Dockety went mad. He had been standing entranced, splay-lipped, avid eyes bulging, waiting for the confirmation of the expert. Now he leaped up into the air and howled as an animal howls who has found his prey and made his kill.

"Yee-ow! One billion plunks! Whee-ee-ow! Mine! All of it! Whoop-ee-ee! Wow, watch my smoke! Keep your eye on Jimmy Dockety! I'll buy the hull —— —— street! Every swell Jane in every swell joint in Broadway! Whoo-oo-ie-ee! Yow!"

He took breath to paw at the stuff, to pat it with his hands, to pick at it with his finger-nails.

"Wow, looky! I kin pick it off with me hands! Oh, yuh lovely li'l yaller goo! Honey, I love yuh sure. An' ye're sure mine! One billion bucks of yuh, sweetie! Whie-ee-ee!"

His madness transmitted itself to Babson.

"*Two* billion!" he yelled in chorus. "——, there's *ten* billion bucks in sight!"

And he seized upon Dockety to dance with a grotesque kicking of the heels and an accompaniment of shrill yelps.

King wept silently and danced an uncouth *pas seul* round the two.

The wizard had to shriek his malediction above the clamor.

"Look upon it, white men! Wrap yourselves in it! Eat it; it is yours! Look well upon it; for never shall white men look upon it again!"

The direct menace impinged upon Babson's consciousness even through his delirium. He let go of his capering partner for long enough to cast an apprehensive glance round for impending danger. Seeing only the old wizard, he shrieked his derision.

"What threatens, old man? What does your Lord Sun think he's going to do?"

The wizard returned his look with cold calm and answered his ribald question with inexorable conviction.

"I do not know, white man. I go to make the magic that my fathers wrote in their wisdom, and Lord Sun will then protect his own."

"What 'z he say?" demanded Dockety. "Let 'm go. He's crazy. Run along, old man. Git outa here an' cuss all yuh wants. We ain't worryin' about nothin' in the woild never no more."

He fell to his uncouth capering again, while he apostrophized the miracle vein of gold with his endearments.

The wizard left them and climbed with deliberation—though speedily, for the sun was low—up the rough causeway to the foot of the beetling cliff which frowned from the left side of the pass squarely down upon the miraculous vein of the metal which must never be found by white men, since it had been the curse of the land from that far day when the white men first came.

At the cliff base was an outstanding rock, a few feet in front of it. The top of the rock had been roughly leveled at some ancient period. The wizard knew about it; for it was the magic rock that the string writing of his fathers spoke of. He clambered up to the level surface and squatted himself down on it. Then he began the incantation that the wisdom of his fathers had prescribed.

"*Illappa*," he screamed. "*Inti, Ccana arajpacha!* Lord Sun, Light of the Heavens, thy servant calls. Protect the secret that is thine, Lord Sun. The sacrifice is prepared. Lord Sun, make manifest thy power."

And he banged an accompaniment with a rising crescendo on his ancient drum.

Tum-tum ta-tum tum-tum-tum ta-tum-ta-tum tum Tumm TUM! He banged, and screamed his invocation as he had read it in the record of knotted strings.

Down in the bowl the waltzing white men heard it. The cliff behind the old man's platform curved over to form a regular sounding board that amplified and projected his yells in waves which carried down to them with startling clearness. They howled back at the old man and waved derisive arms and wafted uncouth kisses to him; and then fell once more to their crazy capering.

Tum ta-tum tum TUM TUM! banged the wizard again, and his shrill yell rose to the Lord Sun to take the sacrifice that was prepared for him and to protect his secret from these profaners and their kind for ever. Almost like some wild evangelist upon a pulpit he looked, with the great black sounding-board behind him to broadcast his exhortation.

Lord Sun smiled serenely through the gap between the cliffs and reflected the beauty of his waning brilliance from a myriad facets of the vast snow-bank and dripped icy water upon the capering white men. That was all.

But the ancient wizard never faltered in his sublime faith. The wisdom of his fathers had promised a manifestation, he did not know what; and the ancient wisdom had worked true in every detail. Surely would the Lord Sun protect his secret which his servant was too feeble to guard.

He screamed, therefore, again as he had read in the ancient record, and banged the reverberating crescendo to culminate with the highest pitch of his yell.

Tum Tum. Illappa! Achachi-pa sutima! Tum-ta-tum. Tum Tum TUM! Illappa! TUM TUM TUMM-MM-MM-MMM!!!

The echoes boomed and crackled from the sounding-board across to the great snow-bank and back again with sublimated, softened vibrations.

And then the Lord Sun heard, and spoke his answer to his priest.

At first it was a whisper, wafting softly from somewhere out on the snow. Then a sigh, a long, slow, wet sigh. Then silence! Then a trickling running sound; and a little cascade of icy water drenched the demoniac white men who leaped and danced before the secret that must be hid.

They ducked away from under with oaths and looked up angrily to see who had done this thing to them. Then *they* heard it.

The voice of Lord Sun rose in its might. The whispering, sighing, trickling merged into a sound of rushing; and the rushing to a roaring; and a sudden icy wind screamed round the bowl of the valley.

Above that scream rose a scream of awful fear from the white men and another scream of mingled awe and triumph from the wizard.

Then all other sounds were drowned in the roar and thunder and crash of the whole glistening snow-slope as it whirled down from the face of the mountain in one vast, all-engulfing avalanche.

The wizard threw himself on his face and clung to the surface of the rock with all his fingers and toes—as he had once before clung to his own rock; while the icy hurricane tore at his limbs and the mountain crests shook all round him to the crash and thunder and roar of the manifestation of Lord Sun's might.

For many minutes the dread revelation continued, till finally it rumbled and moaned and whispered again and died away in a cool, clammy silence.

When the wizard dared to look again the bowl of the valley was full, almost to the base of his rock, and a fine white mist hung over it all.

Then the Lord Sun, having blotted out the secret that had caused his people to vanish and having covered it all with a clean white mantle, plunged into that hole behind the mountain-tops.

Old Mamu the wizard crept shakily from his magic rock and traversed the pass once more. He muttered frightened incantations to himself and chanted an awe-stricken pæan to the glory of his god; and then he made for himself another wad of the coca-leaf and girded up his loins for a long hike to do his part in the utter effacement from the knowledge of white men of the secret that was the sacred trust of his fathers.

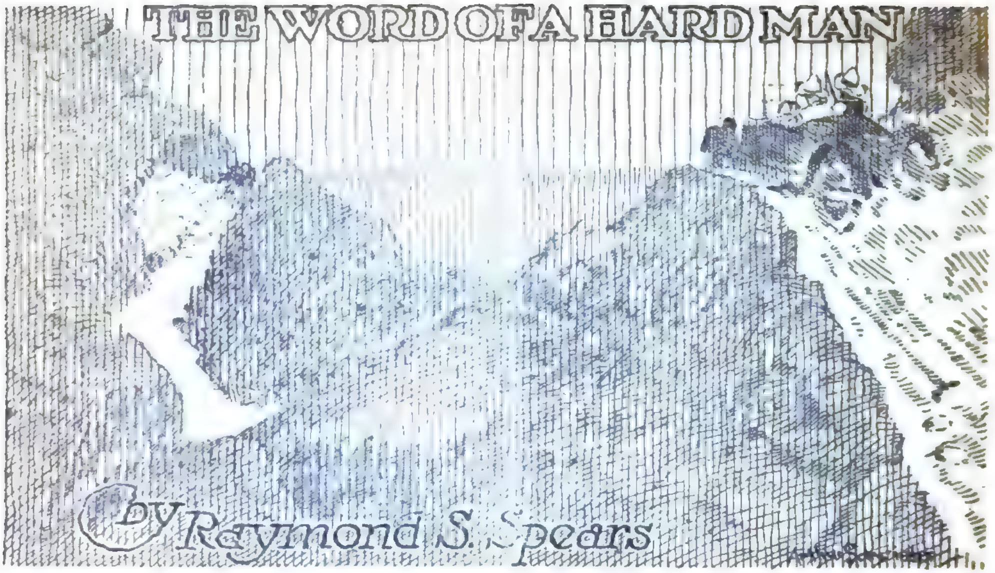
There was that writing to be rescued from a body which lay somewhere in the ravine above his sacred lake. And a siphon to be broken.

REVERIE

by Bill Adams

I'D LIKE to hold a big ship's wheel again,
Standing unsheltered in the wind and rain,
Watching a school of porpoises go by,
Steering the clipper true, at "full and by."
It would be nice to be a boy once more,
Laughing, all heedless of the fading shore:
A boy with all the wide, wide seas ahead,
Aboard a ship decked in the sunset's red;
A clipper with the crimson on her sails,
And stars awakening, and cold fire trails
Glowing beside her, and the low moon's light
To break a path of beauty down the night!
I'd love to go, just once again, where stormy sea-winds blow!
I'd love to hear my shipmates' cheery voices ringing clear!
I'd like to have my youth back, that bright day
When whis'pring voices echoed, "Come away—!"
I knew no ache, no hard world-wonder then:
But the bold songs of plain hard-living men!
The sun was ours, the stars, the glimmered moon,
And much of laughter, and a fiddle's tune——
I'd like to hold a big ship's wheel again,
Standing unsheltered in the wind and rain;
To roll a fluttered sail, high in the night,
With thunder rolling and the lightning bright,
And the black seas upheaved and challenging,
And Old Man Death about!—*Hark to them sing!*
I hear their singing, lads I used to know;
I hear ship's tolling bells, the big winds blow;
I feel the packet roll, hear some one say:
"Do ye remember Bill? W'ere's 'e today?"

THE WORD OF A HARD MAN



by Raymond S. Spears

Author of "Riding Back," "Taking Hold," etc.

THE Rabbit-Head Brand covered about a hundred square miles—64,000 acres—in the Cottontail Mountains. This cluster of hills and peaks sloped down in all directions to vast desert plains; and out from the Cottontails in various directions at distances of from twenty to a hundred miles other ranges and clusters of mountains emerged through the "gyp" or soda crust of the plateau. If the mountains covered a large area, there were likely to be several large outfits using them, but the Rabbit-Head Brand permitted no intrusion of its mesquite, cactus, greasebush and flowers.

Flowers? Indeed, and decidedly yes. Never a range of mountains more beautiful than the Cottontails after warm Spring showers had opened wide the seedlings and yellow, blue, purple, red, pink flowers—all colors of flowers—bloomed. That is, if there happened to be Spring rains, or even Winter snows that melted, saturating the ground.

"Stonehead" Garspean was head and owner of the Rabbit-Head. He was a big man who was responsible for many a sway-back horse, which he had forked when the colt was too young. Pity for any animal seems never to have entered Garspean's heart. The tragedy of the thousands of head that he shipped into the slaughter pens probably never occurred to him as a terrific fact. He did not name his horses, but sent a boy out for "that sorrel slip-brand" or "that lop-eared bay" or "that scoundrel black."

His four or five hundred horses and eight or twelve thousand cattle were almost an entirety in his mind. Of course, calves, she-stuff, three-year-olds, breed-bulls, hold-overs, cuts divided his herd into sections, and he would group them according to how the waterholes which certain bunches used, or valleys in which they grazed gave him a geographical division. It was said he could tell north-side from south-side feeders by their hair, since the sun faded those along the south side more than the more shaded animals on the north.

Garspean was hard. No soft, weak or hesitant man ever rode long in his outfit. He wore a heavy six-shooter on his belt, which he used if a horse broke its leg or some sick cow needed killing. That was the normal use of a weapon. He killed rattlesnakes, too, if it wasn't inconvenient to shoot them. Generally he carried a long-barreled rifle in a boot or across his saddle before him, so that he could shoot a wolf or cougar should he see one; and he killed a number of predatory beasts every year, bringing a distinct saving in young stock especially, which the raiders would have taken as their toll.

And Garspean had a record of dead men.

He had killed meddlers with his brand, catching them and leaving them lying where they fell for the vultures. The Cottontails were his mountains! Vague rumors sometimes drifted out to the shipping-point, Redeye, that Garspean in a moment of exasperation had on occasion shot some cowhand who in a stress proved wanting, as in failing to check a stampede or in flinching when a cringe meant letting a lot of cuts escape back into a herd, so that "the calf had to be licked over again"—work done extra and needlessly. Such victims doubtless were more or less decently buried.

The men who remained with Garspean were naturally men in their way as hard, as cold, as precise, as the boss, each in the particular job that had to be done, whether riding, driving the ranch automobile, branding and cutting wattles or tracking strays. They laughed at cruel, brutal things.

The foreman was Dan Crites. He weighed nearly two hundred, about forty pounds less than the owner. None of the dozen others in the outfit weighed more than one hundred and sixty pounds. Crites and the boys rode beautifully, and with Old Garspean looking on, there was no prettier sight in any cow country than to see them rounding up two thousand head in Goodwater or Tangle Gulches, or in Big Mesquite Valley, or over any section of the ranch.

Garspean would go to some knoll or vantage point and watch the work. He could see for miles, and he read conditions, progress, by the dust that rose. Come night and Crites knew hardly more than the old man—and in any case two or three questions, an explanation as brief, and the matter was as well understood by Garspean as by the participants.

Garspean rode to the county seat every little while. He was the big man of Fragrant Court. He would roar into town with his ninety-horsepower automobile's cut-out open and swing up to the office of Sheriff Cal Hambrey at sixty miles an hour, and application of the brakes would skid his machine slam to the tie-rail, throwing a cloud of dust higher than the court-house cupola. His arrival expressed his feelings precisely.

HE CAME in that way one May afternoon; and when Chippy Bicken, the driver, made the skidding stop it threw probably two buckets full of fine sand and dust over a touring-outfit which happened to be in front of the Kids and Calves Restaurant. A man, woman and two children were in the outfit, and the man, recognizing the imminent insult, threw up a tarpaulin that was partly over the outfit to protect the two girls and his wife.

The next instant as Stonehead Garspean and "Chippy" Bicken came through the edge of the dust, smiling at their humor, both of them looked through the tawny cloud into two first-class revolver muzzles.

"Gentlemen," the tourist said as the quiet increased, "you'll kindly dust off my outfit there. The madam will hand you the whisk brooms."

"What, you g—" Garspean began; but the look in the tourist's eyes was unmistakable.

"Unbuckle your belt—you!" Garspean was told, while Chippy kept his own hands up.

Then it was Chippy's turn.

"Go dust that car off; clean it good!" the tourist warned.

The dust was heavy, the wind brisk. The car-thrown cloud settled rapidly as it drifted away down the famous Cattle Lane main street of Fragrant Court. Garspean glanced around uneasily. There wasn't a county official in sight; not a deputy sheriff, not even the assistant city marshal. Down the street and across the way along the sidewalk of the business blocks were a good many people, spectators, but no one by whom Garspean could expect release from this most unexpected task.

"Get busy!" the tourist suggested, and, lowering the muzzle of his left-hand revolver, he let go a bullet that split the sole of Garspean's right boot. The stinging burn made Garspean jump his boot a foot in the air. He went to the tourist outfit as ordered; and then he and Chippy not only whisked the outfit good, they also rubbed and polished the car beautifully, taking off stains that had been on it long before Garspean's humor and bad manners had thrown sand into the faces of children and a woman.

Time and again Garspean turned in his wrath; but he did it once too often, for he started to curse, unable, as he thought, to restrain his indignation. He found that he had more self-control than his proud and haughty spirit ever before had admitted. For as he turned, cursing, the tourist pulled the trigger. A bullet went through the hump of Garspean's long and powerful nose.

"Now don't let that blood drip on the car," the tourist warned, "for yo're shore goin' to wallop the old bus clean, now 't yo're at it. Yo' kin use yo're handkerchief if yo' want to, though."

No one crossed the street to the courthouse tie-rail. But the whole population, excepting officials, gathered along the west side of the street in the shade, watching the strangest spectacle ever remembered there —a proud and haughty rancher involuntarily performing a menial task for a tourist. A whisper ran through the throng. The tourist's license was from Utah, a fact that Garspean somehow had neglected to observe. Who the Hades is a tourist anyhow?

By and by, though, Garspean wiped off the two licenses on the car, front and rear. Holding his bleeding nose with one hand, he carefully wiped the dust and mud from the red license till the tourist was satisfied.

This was the final task. The tourist's car stood as bright and shiny as could be. It was as large a car, had cost more, and was a newer, much better machine than the old Cottontail mountain rancher's own, despite the power.

"Now I reckon that'll do, boys," the tourist said, looking over the job with a critical eye. "How about it, Old Hole in the Nose? Is your word good for anything?"

"What do you mean?" the rancher choked, for the guns menaced him.

"My wife, two daughters and I are hungry, and we calc'lated to dine in this here victual store, so to speak. If yo're mad, account of repairing the insult to a lady, I ain't through with yo'. If yo' be, an'll give yo're word, yo' can go."

"I'm mad!" Garspean replied briefly.

"All right; I know by that yo're a good man, probably jes' as good's I am. Yo'n yo're boy there, step inside. Yo' don't eat with us, understand. At the same time yo' eat, to keep us company."

The two went in. Never had Garspean eaten such a meal as he now encompassed. He managed to plug the wound through his nose, however, and ate—roast beef, potatoes and various other fixings. Chippy lost no appetite from the fact that he was under the menace of two guns across the next table but one. On all sides were numerous customers of the restaurant who ate enormously, minding their own business but taking in the drama that was enacted under their eyes.

"Now, gentlemen," the tourist remarked, "you two'll sit on my car's front seat. Wife, kids and I'll sit behind. Youngster, I reckon yo' kin drive moderate if yo' try. This here car of mine's a good one, but I don't want hit abused, not a bit. Yo' jes' start hit, shift the gears right an' take the west fork down the end the street. Get me?"

"Yes, sir!" Garspean's chauffeur replied; and, having paid for six good meals, the tourist followed his two captives into the car.

The woman, who was a tall, slender, fine-looking matron with bright red cheeks and a smile of serene confidence, brought out the children.

The Utah car turned down the street, took the west fork and rolled away over the plain, throwing gyp dust in a not too emphatic a cloud. Chippy obeyed orders. He drove so as not to break anything, or even bump the car overmuch.

"If yo' should bust an axle, yo' know, I'm going to be indignant, as well as particular about my etiquette!" the captor said.

Chippy didn't know what extrusion from his own head might attract the man's bullet. He had nothing to compare with Garspean's nose as a mark, except his ears. Both his ears stood out from the sides of his head, and he felt them tingling as his neck grew red with apprehension. No! He'd sure hate to have his ears split by that stern man behind him.

Twenty miles out, the tourist said—

"Now I reckon we're a reasonable distance out; stop the car!"

The car came to a slow stop.

"Slide out the right-hand side, both yo' gentlemen," the tourist ordered quietly.

Garspean and Chippy stepped out all clear. They were against the slope of a mountain that rose high to the north. The place looked bare and deserted. Glancing around, the tourist nodded his head.

"Theh's town, twenty miles."

The traveler motioned toward the Court which stood like an eye in the midst of desert behind them.

"I expect walking with that split sole won't be none too comfortable. Good boots for riding, but mighty po'r for walking. They're the Dalrymples, forty-five dollars, eh?"

"Let me suggest the next time yo' throw

dust and insults oveh a touring-outfit, look first to see'f a lady don't need yo' consideration, and look second to see'f there ain't a —— sight better man into it than yo' or any whole outfit like yo' is into it. Understand?"

"Yo've got the drap on us, strangeh—that's all!" Garspean said; for if he was mean, bad, brutal, he was brave.

"Yes, I've got the drop," the man replied slowly, looking at them. "Yo' ain't made no promises, course. I don't shoot no one down in cold blood, either. I know yo', though. Yo're mean, p'ison and bitter. Don't forget, I know that—probably a sight better'n yo' do. Now git!"

The two turned and started along the roadway toward Fragrant Court. They clumped and limped after the manner of those with sod-boring heels in high-arched boots. They did not look back, and the touring-car rolled on, making some noise. In two minutes or so it swung around a point out of sight.

"Now, Chippy! Like —— for my roadster!"

"Sure!" the cowboy exclaimed, springing to run.

"An' guns—don't forget the guns!" the rancher called.

"No'ndeed. The others?" Chippy hesitated.

"No—jes yo' n' me! Hit's ouh funeral, yo' know!"

THE great slope rising there out of the plain was the south point of the Cottontail Mountains. The tourist, a stranger in the land, had brought Garspean just around the corner from the Rabbit-Head Brand ranch, only about a mile from the main buildings.

In twenty minutes Chippy was home; and as the foreman looked on without a word Chippy gathered up two rifles, two belts with ample supplies of revolver ammunition and two revolvers, besides some five or six boxes of twenty shells each of rifle ammunition. These things were rushed into the powerful roadster in which the rancher generally drove alone, away down into Austin or Ft. Worth or El Paso or Albuquerque—wherever his notion or business happened to take him.

Chippy with a grin on his sharp, hard little face started the motor and lifted in the gears, jumped the car into the ranch roadway and down at the ranch gate hit the planks with a slam audible half a mile, throwing the weighted swing-shuts wide and fast. Out in the open desert he let the motor sing.

He was, all told, only thirty minutes behind the tourist when he made the necessary circuit of the ranch road into the main trail. He picked up Garspean only forty minutes behind the tourist. The big rancher sighed with comfort as he drew off his split-sole boot, took off his stocking, rubbed some grease into the broken skin and then pulled on another sock and another boot, which Chippy had thoughtfully brought for him.

As they rounded the foot of their home mountains, they looked ahead. Garspean uttered a low cry of delight. In the pass some twenty miles across the flat and up the long slope of Broken Ridges he descried the puffing-up of dust—only thirty miles ahead!

In that vast land distances are apparently enormous. In fact they are not so if one's mind is adjusted to them. A mile is nothing; twenty miles are but a step; and it takes a hundred miles to be a jaunt, a thousand to be a trip.

"That scoundrel—that fool!"

Garspean jeered and laughed as he made sure of the action of the rifles, the triggers of every revolver. He studied the shells, every cartridge, and tossed three or four over the side when he detected some trifling dent or a bullet that was not exactly seated or not perfectly crimped in. He leaned back and began to smoke at his ease while Chippy stepped on the accelerator.

No! Chippy wasn't going top speed. The important thing was to overtake the tourist, not to make a record at fast driving. Records risk breaks and smashes. Thirty—thirty-five—forty miles an hour was enough, and gaining ten miles an hour would bring them up with the tourist in three hours.

"He'll run for it!" Garspean grinned. "But this car'll run him down. If he don't suspect anything we'll overtake him out there in the Big Flat. Then we'll shore trade him—right!"

Garspean would trade the hold-up for a murder, no less. He thought no more about the woman and the two girls than he thought about breaking his young horse's back or about sending thousands of cattle into the slaughter pen annually. He thought he couldn't think about any such soft and tender nonsense as that. Surely he had never dreamed of polishing another man's car for him while all the Fragrant Court townsmen looked on.

"I'll settle some of them! I'll shoot the grin off'n two or three faces!" Garspean whispered, half to himself.

He knew the necessity of killing to wipe out the possibility of being laughed at. Some one was sure to grin or make a crack, for such an insult a bullet would be the instant retort.

They ran up into the pass over the Broken Ridges. They jammed through on the narrow, difficult trail along washes and down the slope on the far side, in and out. They jumped into and out of narrow levels and then around a point on to the long down slope of the ridge on the far side.

There lay the Big Flat. The trail led as far as they could see out into it, pale and narrowing, a film in the perspective. Their eager eyes looked—and saw nothing. No lift of dust betrayed the stranger's automobile.

Garspean looked meditatively at his watch as the car came to a standstill. They had come thirty miles. They had started thirty miles behind their quarry. They could see more than sixty miles along that trail; and in that afternoon sunshine they could surely have seen an automobile plowing through the alkali. But there was no sign of the car.

They were nonplused. Garspean looked at Chippy, and Chippy looked at Garspean. They had made up their minds that the scoundrel tourist was on the run, that he would be out there on the Big Flat. But he wasn't. Their minds for minutes refused to function in any direction but that in which they had been going.

"Well, dang me!" Garspean turned to look back. "He must 'a' turned off back in the Broken Ridges then! Made camp there—sure! That's it! We got him headed! Turn around—come on back!"

Chippy did a marvelous bit of automobile driving, turning around in two ruts with a two-hundred-foot drop on one side and a mass of broken rocks on the other. They started back. Their cut-out echoed in the ridges against the slopes and precipitous faces. They watched for the place where the tourist outfit had turned off the trail.

They went on up the grade into the pass. They could look eastward to the Cottontail Mountains, out there in the afternoon sunshine. They stopped, peering around in bewilderment. Garspean clambered out of the roadster to look up and down, back and forth. Chippy raised the hood of his motor to smell the oil, to see if it was heated.

"Well, I shore lost my head!" Garspean grunted. "That scoundrel must of turned off down to the spring! Do yo' reckon he 'lowed to camp theh?"

"Looks like!" Chippy exclaimed.

"What'd he think I am?"

Garspean gasped at the man's audacity.

The distance down to the spring fork was more than a mile. No one but a native would have known about that good water unless some local man told where it was. When the two drove the car down to the trail fork, they found where their own car had come up, packing the road with their tires.

They looked at the spring trail. They saw no sign of any car having passed that way. The dust, sand and gravel lay trampled with cattle tracks—that was all.

Garspean stared fretfully. He didn't like things he couldn't immediately solve, by the looks or by his knowledge. He strolled up the trailway toward the spring, the rifle across his elbow, his eyes looking at the ground. Chippy followed, and as they studied the ground they became more and more interested, more and more alert.

Suddenly Chippy reached down, plunged his hand into the loose sand and, letting a scoopful run through his fingers and over the edges of his palm, spoke in a low voice to Garspean—

"Look't!"

There was a clot composed of sand and gear-case grease which had dripped into the sand.

"He brushed his tracks!" Garspean hissed, turning with his rifle ready.

ON THE instant, behind and to their right, a heavy rifle was discharged. The bullet, a .405 grizzly-caliber bullet, smashed through the receiver of Garspean's own heavy .30-06 repeater. Before Chippy could turn, they heard the familiar clatter of a smoothly working repeater's mechanism, and another bullet tore Chippy's rifle from his grasp.

Garspean's and Chippy's hands were paralyzed by the vibration of the bullets blows; as they melted, splashing through the heavy metal of the men's rifles, tearing the broken weapons from their grasp. Surprize and hurt for the instant held them, and in that instant they were conscious of the rifle workings.

"Now then—" a voice came harshly down out of the brush behind them—"now then, stand as ye are. Drop those belts! You, big feller, first!"

Garspean hesitated, then did as ordered. Chippy followed suit. Then the tourist came down out of the brush, carrying his big rifle lightly and nervously balanced in his hands, that nervousness of a man eager for the slightest, faintest excuse to use the weapon to kill. Garspean recognized the feeling. He had had it himself.

The tourist's face had a hard, chill, grim look of hate in it, much different from the expression it had worn back in Fragrant Court when Chippy and Garspean cleaned the car. Even the shot through Garspean's nose had been without anger. Now the stranger was savage, vicious, and looked more deadly than Garspean had ever been able to look.

"Yo' two followed to kill me, account of my not takin' your word that yo'd call hit quits," the tourist said. "I seen yore dust comin', 'course. Yo' bull-headed scoundrel, yo' thought nobody could read dust er know alkali but yo'? Huh! Well, I breshed out one trail, an' hit fooled yo'. I seen yo' come, had a good notion to pick yo' off as yo' rolled up the grade. Heh! I've played hide 'n' seek with Sioux an' Cheyennes; I've trailed hold-ups in my time.

"Yo' raw-bones thought nobody could play a rough game but yo'! Dad-gone! Well, theh's two less to pester honorable, reputable citizens now. I got yo'! I'll dump yo' roadster into that gulch an' break down that overhang. I got two-three sticks of prospector's dynamite. An' I'll leave yo' where yo' won't chase me no more."

"Wha— Yo' wouldn't in cold blood—" Garspean gasped.

"Talk to me 'bout cold blood? Followin' me, two to one, with long guns an' goin' to bushwhack me—an' my wife theh! My two girls! What yo' think? I ain't man enough to pertect my family from sneakin', miserable, hair-hided blue-skins like yo'? Git up that draw, theh!"

"Don't—don't kill us!" Chippy choked.

"G'wan!" the tourist ordered. "I'll——"

He threw his rifle muzzle as if to shoot them there. Chippy dropped on his knees, begging. Garspean, trembling and shuddering, tried mightily to control himself. Never in his life had he begged. He had made many a man go down on his knees. Here was a man as hard, as bitter, and more justified in doing meanness killing than Garspean had ever been perhaps.

Chippy's breaking of spirit, his abject fear, did not make it easier for Garspean. The huge rancher looked their captor in the face. The man's eyes were squinting, the pupils like black pinheads, his gray-blue iris like a crystalline color. Death was in that face. Garspean knew it.

"Turn the kid loose!"

Garspean nodded to the weakling, the cruel youth who could cheerfully kill, but shrank with arrant cowardice from death.

"Nobody's going to know this job's done. Think I'm goin' to be hounded five hundred miles off across this scoundrel desert, bushwhacked by telephone in every mountain range?"

The tourist laughed, clattering like a kingfisher, and about as musical.

" 'Course—I don't blame yo'!" Garspean exclaimed with a sudden rush of feeling, choking up with an emotion he had never felt before.

"Yo' know —— well yo' had no business to treat any stranger thataway; an' I don't take that from anybody!"

"Who all mout yo' be, stranger?"

"Jim Kildene—Cat-Tail Brand—Utah."

"I knowed yo' was a rancher."

Garspean caught his breath.

"Yo' gits mad like one. Well—get up!"

He kicked Chippy, lifting the wretched youth erect with a boot toe and crowding him up the draw as ordered by Kildene of the Cat-Tail Brand. Kildene's expression did not soften. When a man and his family have been bulldozed, insulted, attacked, and then murder attempted for revenge because the cowardly assault has been successfully resented, one doesn't soften, especially when to let a scoundrel go but invites repetition of the attempt to kill.

They went up into a narrow wash. Overhead was the vast mass of earth, which a kick would loosen. Here two dead bodies might lie for ages, undiscovered. Chippy was crying and sobbing aloud. The big rancher was pale and drawn up at the shoulders. Thus men face being hanged!

Thus they go forth to stand against a wall to be shot.

"Stranger!" Garspean exclaimed as he turned to face the bullet. "I'm not afraid to die——"

"I know that," Kildene said. "It don't make no difference, though. Yo'd take the chance to leave my woman and two daughters out here in the desert—yo' scoundrel!"

"No, sir! Not now!" Garspean shook his huge, shaggy head. "I've learned a lesson—tol'able late in life, from the looks!"

A slightest of smiles flashed across his countenance, his big, brutal face, with its scars, weathering and lumped-up experience, now pale and stern with desperate expectation. The stranger said nothing. Garspean looked at the man groveling in the bed of the wash.

"Probably it's late to say it, stranger. Understand, I see what yo' went through. I don't blame yo'. I don't want to die, though, until I told yo'-all I know I lost my haid, was a dad-blamed fool; and I want to apologize to yo'—to tell yo' wife an' the two gals."

"Reckon yo'll die, holding it ag'in' me?" Kildene sniffed.

"No, suh, I don't. Some —— fools jes' natcherly deserve to die. Chippy here—sorry about him, though he's sure cowardly exceptin' when he's ridin' wide an' has a chance. He'd take a tighter squeak an' 'most anybody; but he's sure yellow, when he ain't a chance in the world."

"Yo're mistaken," Kildene said simply. "I've neveh killed anybody when it wa'n't necessary. I don't expect it's necessary now to kill yo'. Knowin' ranchers—good men, if hard, like yo'— 'Course, I take yo' word, same's I'd like to have mine taken if I ran rambunctious off'n the handle some time, like a man's apt to do."

"Yo' takes my word? Yo' ain't goin' to kill us then?" Garspean asked, his voice hollow and husky.

"No."

Garspean wiped the sweat that was running down and hanging in big drops on his shaggy eyebrows. He stood, trembling a bit weakly, for his call had been the closest he had ever known, and he knew it. Only exactly the right words had stood between him and dying — and those words the hardest for a proud, high-spirited man to say, which he had hesitated to say a long time, even though he suspected he might thus save his life.

Only had he been able to bring them to his tongue and lips when he realized that he owed it to a woman to say them, even though he should still die.

Chippy, sick at the stomach with relief, stumbled and staggered down after the two big men. Their duel was over. They had settled their differences. Down at the big roadsters, Garspean beckoned Chippy into his. He turned to look Kildene in the eyes—fine, bright blue eyes, and well open now.

" 'Course, probably you won't think it reasonable, old man," Garspean said. "I know, though, there's no hard feelings left now. Not in you, not in me. Reckon yo'd come back with me to the Cottontails? My brand's the Rabbit-Head, back yon——"

He beckoned toward the beautiful cluster of mountains, now rose and blue in the sunlight of the waning afternoon.

"That your range?" Kildene grinned.

"Yes."

"Yo' know, I wondered how in darnation yo' picked up that car so blamed quick! I must of dropped yo' two just around the p'int from the home ranch?"

"Exactly what yo' did!" Garspean chuckled.

"Now wa'n't that dog-gone careless!" Kildene grimaced. " 'Course, I'd shore like to look oveh that range. Wife noticed some fine, curly-rump cattle up in the mesquite——"

"Yes, suh!" Garspean exclaimed with pride. "If yo' want to see some real beef, yo' come back! 'Course, I know up in Utah——"

"All right, old man! I'll take yo' word about anything but cattle," Kildene replied with emphasis. "But when it comes to cows, yo' got to show them to me if they's got the call on our stuff."

TO "BUGS"—AND BUTTERFLIES

by Douglas Oliver

IT GOT round, right off the bat, that back home Barker had been an entomologist or something of the sort. So the "Elegant Eleventh," with the Canadian Army in France, labeled him "Bugs" and chuckled up their sleeves at the big-rimmed tortoise-shells he wore.

"We've sure drawn a lot of funny ones, lately," remarked "Dusty" Dickerson, peacemaker and every fellow's friend.

The C. O. who sat next to the lovable adjutant at mess-table took a squint at the expressionless face behind Barker's tortoise-shells, then whispered back:

"You're right, Dusty—but we'll have to make the best of it. Stick him with Fisher. He's short a platoon officer, there."

So Barker went to "Beer" Company—to "Big Bill" Fisher, a jigsaw puzzle of temperament with which new pieces—like Barker—had a hard time fitting in.

Barker went at a bad time, too, for Fisher's nerves were still jangly from the Fresnoy fuss. Into that fuss Fisher had led one hundred and sixteen, all ranks. Out of it he'd groped back with four and a half survivors. The half-man had been a pet sergeant whom Fisher lugged back, crying over him as a mother might cry for her babe, and who had "gone west" with the next sun.

A puzzle, indeed, was this big fellow, merciless in his assay of man-worth, who demanded the last pound of flesh from his command and who, outwardly, gave little in return. He, himself, wore no tunic-ribbons and said he never would. He wrote no recommendations for others and never would, it was said. Gave little that way, true, but, inwardly, gave his all—a heart-brimming over of love and worship for his Beer boys—his hand-picked crowd whom he drove through —— when occasion demanded. And afterwards wept over.

After the Fresnoy fuss something had snapped in Big Bill and his eyes had gone hard. And he had stamped about like a lost soul, had taken to walking the streets of the town, at late hours when he should have been sleeping. So Bugs Barker went to Fisher at a bad time.

"Find a bunk for Barker, will you, Bill?" asked Dusty Dickerson as he ushered the new officer into Beer's hut that night.

Fisher looked up from his cot. His face flushed and he spoke jerkily.

"Not havin' any" was his reply.

"What's that?" smiled the lovable adjutant. He was not accustomed to having his statements questioned.

"Meaning just what I say," declared Fisher. "Not havin' any. No bugologist for me."

"Come on now, Bill," pleaded Dickerson, the peacemaker.

"Come on, ——" snorted Fisher and he rose awkwardly to his feet.

He took a step forward and snapped his fingers in the adjutant's face.

"You wish *that*—" he indicated Barker—"on me—and I quit."

"Why, Bill," said Dickerson, "you're actually talking cuckoo."

From a far corner some pacificatory voice chimed in:

"You're right, Dusty. Bill isn't himself. He's queer—he is."

Big Bill swung about and banged the table with his fist. Two candles toppled over and spluttered out. The hut was on pins and needles.

"Queer, eh?" he exploded. "Cuckoo, eh? Well, maybe, but not that queer that you can make me the goat—stick anything across on me. I want scrappers for Beer company, I do. I don't want any goof in my crowd. I pick my kind. No mama's goody-good for yours truly. I'll bet his mother don't——"

"Now say," interrupted a mild voice.

Bugs Barker was fumbling with his glasses. He tucked them in his whistle pocket.

"What you've said about me," he quietly resumed, "doesn't matter. But what you were saying of my mother—*does*. I'm afraid I must ask you—Fisher, is it?—to put up your hands."

They tried to stop him, Dickerson and the others did, but he avoided their clutches and plowed blindly into a home-run punch that dumped him in a heap against the box stove. But he was up in a jiffy and asking for more. It was pitiful the punishment he took before Dickerson and two others hit Big Bill's legs with a football tackle and brought him thumping to the floor. There they sat on him hard. And they held him down while the "Doc", called from his quarters, gave him the once-over.

They got the table righted and the candles going again, and by the flickering light the Doc read the little glass stick he had forced into Fisher's mouth.

"*Whew*," he said, and sent an orderly scampering after an ambulance.

It drew up to the door presently and Big Bill was dumped within. The motor coughed and spluttered but finally got into full stride, and was soon a winking tail-lamp far down the cobbled lane.

"Couple of weeks at Fresnicourt casualty-clearing," explained the Doc, "and he'll be himself again. Nerves shot—lot of fever——"

"Where's Barker?" put in Dickerson.

But Barker had vanished.

"Come on you birds," snapped the adjutant. "He's got to be looked after too."

They hustled out into the darkness, up and down the lines of huts, all over the camp, and eventually they located him at the wagon-lines where the horses and mules watered. They found him bathing his bruised lips and swollen eye.

"Let me help you," said the kindly Dickerson, taking the sopping handkerchief from Barker's hands. And he told the others to slip up to the mess and lift a bit of steak from the morrow's rations.

"It'll fix your eye up in jig-time," he told Barker.

And while the others were routing out the mess-cook Dusty Dickerson gave Bugs Barker some advice. It was to knuckle down to his job and forget the incident.

"Fisher spoke out of turn tonight," he confided, "but he'll never apologize to you. Perhaps he should—but he won't. It's not a way he has of doing things.

"Forget it, Barker. Don't grouch. Look on the bright side. I'll do what I can to smooth out the wrinkles between you two. And some day it'll all come right."

"I see," said Barker, gingerly exploring his bumps.

"You do now," chuckled Dickerson. "But you won't by morning."

Footsteps reached their ears. The steak was coming up. "Let's see," calculated Dickerson. "You won't be fit for parade, tomorrow, Barker. You'd better take the day off. Please yourself what you do."

"I'll get out my net," said Barker.

"Net?" Dickerson was puzzled.

"I brought a net in my kit. I ought to have some luck. Coming up in the mess-cart this afternoon I spotted a lot of fine specimens."

"Specimens?"

"Butterflies. I used to dabble a bit in that line of work."

"So I've heard. I understand."

But he didn't understand, and as he slapped the meat-poultice to Barker's eye he asked himself who on earth could be expected to understand. Rare specimen, was right. The crying question was—

"We've stuck this fellow with Fisher, but how long will he stick?"

Big Bill, he knew, would come back from his fortnight at Fresnicourt with a host of new schemes to go-get Fritz. He would come back to find the latest addition to his band of go-getters fluttering about the sun-baked Villers country, go-getting butterflies. What would Bill say? He could just imagine what Bill would say—

"Go stick your head in your cy'nide bottle and die some place."

It was almost sure to be something like that. Dickerson hoped for peace—prayed that Big Bill might come back sane. If he didn't he probably would run the bugologist out on a patrol, first trip in, and lose him. It was a little way Fisher had, he recalled, with undesirables.

IN THE Mellicourt plain sector you got from one brigade frontage to the other by way of "Creeps" Copse. You got there if you were lucky—and few were.

Men who came through it once fought shy of a second trip. They told weird tales. They said the place was infested by unseen devils that struck with the unexpectedness of lightning.

The close-up of Creeps Copse revealed a few black studs rising from a tangle of undergrowth—a small splotch of color against a great, drab background—a picture of peace.

But the casualty lists continued to grow. And back in hospital at casualty-clearing, or base, bits of Luger lead continued to be dug from pieces of humanity that had been struck by the lightning.

At Fresnicourt Big Bill Fisher listened to the weird tale of a scout officer from the "Iron Sixth" who'd been one of the lucky ones.

"Shot us down quicker than you could wink. Never gave us a chance. Quiet and peaceful one minute, —— the next. Cut loose without any warning. Just *bang—bang—bang—bang—bang*—and they had me. Don't know how the others made out. Those Fritzie ——'s seemed to shoot right out of the air—out of nothing."

"*Huh*," said Big Bill. "Some spot, that piece of bush. What's it look like?"

"'Bout as big as half a minute," replied the wounded chap. "It plugs up that gap that was left in the line, there, after Vimy. One brigade connects up with the other by means of a three-a-night patrol system. At least, that's the dope—but it seldom works."

"How far's the bush from Fritzie's line?" asked Big Bill, athirst for information.

"An easy six hundred yards."

"Fritz must have something up his sleeve," said Big Bill. "He isn't coming all that way to ambush a few patrols. Can't they stop him from getting in the bush? Lay out at dusk and wait for him coming over?"

"We tried that—but no luck. He doesn't come around either flank and he's never been heard coming through the pond."

"Pond?"

"Yes! Pond! We call it that but it's more of a marsh with the water pretty deep in spots. It takes up all of No Man's land from the wood and Fritzie's wire.

"Oh, up front, they've tried every way to intercept him. But he always gets through. How the —— he does it somebody'll have to find out blamed soon or the men'll go mad. Everybody's got the jumps."

"*Huh*," reiterated Big Bill. "I'd like to stop him."

"Well, you'll soon get the opportunity. Your brigade'll be moving in shortly. You'll get your baptism quick enough. Listen! Don't get the idea I've been stuffing you. I haven't—not a bit. It's a —— muddle up there."

BIG BILL FISHER came back to Villers and he came back sane.

There sounded without the rattle of the mess-cart's wheels—the big fellow's deep-throated, "Hello, there," in acknowledgement of the rifle-butt slap of some sentry; and the hut door shoved open.

"Greetings, gang," called Bill.

"Greetings, Bill," returned his Beer boys, who descended upon him in mass formation. He held them off and shook hands, one by one. There was a perceptible stillness as Bugs Barker stepped up and thrust out his hand.

"How do you do, sir?" he said quietly.

"Well, well!" said Big Bill. "Still sticking 'round, eh? Fine."

And he turned on his heel, ejaculating:

"Two cases of Scotch in that cart, gang. Make it snappy."

And they made it snappy. That night they ding-donged in honor of Big Bill's return. Candles burned to a late hour and glasses clinked and songs were sung—some so good and others not so good—and in between times the unceasing tinkle of the Doc's banjo proclaimed for the benefit of the unedified that Frankie and Johnnie were lovers; and Lord, how they could love!

It was Dusty Dickerson, self-appointed bar-keep, mixing drinks with the dexterity of a Jimmie of the Savoy, who got the toasts business under way. Waxed eloquent, he did, in his eulogy of Big Bill. The latter promptly returned the compliment. And others, too, were honored by the crack of a bottle-neck, the *sssz* of a siphon, and the Beer boys' resounding—

"Here's how, old bean."

By and by it came Bugs Barker's turn. Big Bill Fisher, himself, proposed the toast. But neither bottle cracked nor siphon *ssszed.* And there was no "old-bean" stuff. A pin might have been heard to drop as Big Bill lifted a dipperful of water, raised it to his lips and then dashed it along the floor. Momentary silence—then "Frankie and Johnnie," from the tinkling banjo and merriment again swept into power.

Bugs Barker, a prey to emotions, slipped outside. What had they meant? He was not long at a loss for explanation for some one called softly to him. Glancing around he made out the figure of Fisher's batman with face pressed closely to the hut window.

"Don't let that worry you, sir," said the batman. "It's Beer company's custom—that toast. With every new officer it's the same way. They call it their toast to the *Untried.*"

"I see," said Bugs Barker, and his eyes strained through the darkness to the aerodrome on the hill by Camblain way where green ground-flares spouted up their "come home" appeal to some long-overdue bird.

The shindig in the hut broke up about reveille. It was a stiff-necked, sleepy-eyed bunch of Beer boys that tumbled out for nine hours parade. But they got away with it for the C. O., that morning, wasn't concerning himself, as was his wont, with clean shaves and no-hair-around-the-ears and the shine of buttons and badges and the gleam of rifle-barrels and the polish of the five-to-a-clip S. A. A.

Something else was biting him. He tried to make his message to them appear casual but any man with half an eye sensed the prick of gravity in his off-hand talk.

"We go in on the twenty-fourth," he said. "One week from today. And we're taking over the Mellicourt sector. You've all heard of it?"

At the back of the "bat" some wit squeaked encouragement—

"Hearsay ain't evidence, sir."

Ripples of laughter ran up and down the brown ranks.

"Silence!" thundered the C. O., but it was hard for him to keep the twinkle from his eyes.

"It's this way, men," he said. "Things have been going wrong up Mellicourt way for a long time now. In a single week, Creeps Copse, as they call it, has accounted for twenty Canadian dead. That kind of business won't do. Until recently Division was inclined to treat the patrol scare lightly. Now, they have reversed English and treat it seriously—blamed seriously insofar as the Elegant Eleventh is concerned.

"Men—" and the C. O.'s voice rasped—"we've been given the job of cleaning up the muddle."

To one company the task was to be allotted. But which? Straws were suggested as the only fair means of settlement. Lots were drawn. And Big Bill Fisher, who had lain in bed at Fresnicourt plotting new ways of go-getting Fritz, drew the short straw.

The lightning had struck again.

* * *

THE Elegant Eleventh accepted the bad news philosophically. Big Bill Fisher cried a bit and knotted his brow and dug more deeply into his study of Mellicourt maps. And at his bidding Bugs Barker, who spoke a passable French and was good at bargaining, lorried into Bethune where civilians still carried on within easy reach of German guns. There on the canal front Barker got what he'd been sent after—a particular brand of home-brewed wine that made fighting fools of angels as Big Bill would say. And there Barker got some varnish and pins and clips for the butterfly specimens he had netted around Villers, which Big Bill had never seen and which he never intended him to see.

And with the old shopkeeper he had struck up a conversation that drifted from one channel of French life to another. The bent, wizened old man had got quite excited when Barker, beating back in history, touched upon the monks of St. Laurent and their persecutions.

"A great people—a very great people,"

the old shopkeeper told Barker. "But how they had to live—hiding from their persecutors—always hiding."

"Isn't this their old country—'round here?" asked Barker.

"*Non, m'sieur.* Farther south a little. This way from Arras a few kilometers. St. Vaast and Thelus knew them—and Mellicourt."

Bugs Barker, tired and sore from his jolting ride, hit Villers about supper hour. He looked after his platoon, then went into mess. He arrived in time to hear the C. O. remark—

"Brigade's trying to take our minds off the job ahead of us, I guess."

Wherewith he pulled a chit from his pocket and read:

"Brigade sports-day will be held on twenty-second. Entries should be numerous as possible. Get all other ranks interested."

"Got a lot of gall," some one declared.

"Don't know about that," the C. O. differed. "It may do the men good."

"I agree with you, sir," spoke up Big Bill Fisher. "I think every officer should enter something. I'm putting my name down for the mule race."

Sports-day morning found parades canceled. Big Bill looked about for Barker but couldn't find him.

"Seen anything of Mr. Barker?" he inquired of his batman.

"Sure," replied the batman who was of a communicative nature. "He's gone—gettin' butterflies—over the hill."

And he pointed toward Camblain's spires.

"Butterflies?" Big Bill was thunderstruck.

"Sure—him and his net. Didn't you know? I s'pose the other officers wouldn't tell you—didn't want to butt in. Mr. Barker's got a lot o' swell stuff, sir, in his kit. I was lookin' at his collection the other day. Some swell 'specimens,' as he calls 'em. Want to see 'em?" "

"No! But I do want to see him."

Big Bill started to fume, then altered his tactics with an abrupt command to his batman.

"Gather all that butterfly truck of his and dump it in the incinerator. Butterflies, ——!"

With that he stamped away to put the finishing touches to his preparation for the mule race. One track condition barred crops, spurs, and so forth. The judges had ruled out the use of all persuasive instruments. Big Bill wore a huge signet-ring to the palm-side surface of which he had soldered several needle tips. This arrangement he had tested and found to serve its purpose admirably. A sharp slap on his mount's flank—and results were gratifying. One entire afternoon Big Bill had practised with his mule and with his ring and now that sports-day had rolled round he was thoroughly convinced that it was all over but the shouting. So obedient was the mule that it covered the straightway course, already laid out, with never a glimpse sidewise.

And so the starter's pistol cracked. And Big Bill's mule, a half-mile down the valley with the others, set his eyes on the cluster of huts which marked the winning post, put his head down and tore for victory. With half the distance covered Big Bill looked an easy winner.

"Straight as an arrow," one of the judges was heard to remark.

But something happened. From behind a clump of berry-bushes, bordering the course at the three-quarter mark, a slim, capless, tunicless individual, brandishing some net business, dashed directly in the path of the leading entry.

Big Bill's mule had never deviated from the course before, but it did now. Big Bill brought his ring-trick into play but it only produced an effect opposite to that desired. His mount went faster—but not for the coveted goal. Instead it charged wildly into the wagon-lines, stumbling over tent ropes, upsetting canvas, tearing on like a thing possessed, leaving destruction in its wake. Big Bill, although a splendid horseman, was finally thrown twenty yards for a pair of sprained ankles.

They carried him, raving, to his hut and there the Doc delivered his ultimatum.

"Two weeks of a lay-up—and you might as well make the best of it."

Big Bill made the air blue. Tears came to his eyes.

"But Doc," he argued, "I've simply got to go in this trip. I've got a job to pull off."

"Nothing doing," said the Doc, and that ended it.

Big Bill growled some more and then lay back on his cot, his hopes dashed, his honor wounded deeply. It wasn't the loss of a mere race that bothered him, but he had been very keen on the Creeps Copse clean-up. Now, it seemed, misfortune in the person of a mealy-mouthed bug-chaser had robbed him of the one great opportunity. Where was that goof, Barker, anyway?

"Where the ——'s the idiot?" he demanded in stentorian tones. "Go-get him."

They dug Barker up and, like a lamb for the slaughter, led him in before King Temperament. What Big Bill, from his throne, didn't tell Barker isn't worth mentioning. He wound up:

"I've burned your butterfly truck—you big ass—and now I'm going to *burn* you. You're green. You've had no experience in the line and I hadn't thought of using you. But now you draw the whole assignment. You'll go into that Creeps place. And don't you forget it."

"By the way—" Barker spoke up. It had been his intention to tell Fisher of the monks of St. Laurent and the old book about them he'd picked up in Bethune, but Big Bill had snarled interruption:

"By the way, Barker, you don't weigh very —— much. Now, beat it."

Barker beat it. After the door had closed one officer voiced mild protest—

"A bit rough, isn't it, Bill—giving him that patrol?"

"I don't give a tinker's ——," bellowed Big Bill, and they knew that he meant it.

For Big Bill had a way, as it often had been remarked, of dealing with undesirables.

THE Elegant Eleventh took over on the twenty-fourth.

It was a daylight relief, made possible through deep and narrow C. T's. along which the brown platoons, in single-file, wound their way up and over the top of Vimy and down the long slope to the plain lands. By high noon "Relief Complete" had been wired in.

The C. O., touring the front line, found himself confronted with a block, piled high with old wire and planking. Cautiously he hoisted himself over. Directly before him, hidden from prying German eyes by a strip of elephant-iron, Lieutenant Barker squatted. He was using a pair of glasses on Creeps Copse, one hundred yards distant.

"What d'you make out, Barker?" the C. O. inquired.

"Not a thing, sir. Not a stir that I can see."

"Looks peaceful enough," said the C. O. But down in his heart he realized what the place represented—a nasty riddle for whose solution a lot of his men were apt to pay heavily.

"You're for it, aren't you, Barker?" he continued.

"Yes, sir," replied Bugs. "And as I'm for it, as you say, I'd like to play a few hunches."

"Suit yourself," said the C. O. shrugging his shoulders. "It's up to you and Fisher, you know. You're going over there, tonight, I suppose?"

"No, sir. There's a full moon."

"Moon? What's that got to do with it?"

"Everything. I've picked up some information of late. No patrol's been shot up on a pitch-black night."

"No?"

"No!"

"Which proves?"

"That those German —— in the wood need light to shoot by."

"Humph! That's frightfully clever of you, Barker. Any more valuable information?"

"Yes, sir," Barker came back.

"Let's have it."

"Just a hunch though."

"Well?"

"It's quite safe to go through the place in daylight."

"Humph! Seeing is believing."

"I realize that."

"And—one seeing may finish you."

"Maybe—but I'm going across there, directly."

"You are? How many men do you want?"

"One."

"Just one?"

"Yes, sir—the fewer to be snuffed out if things should go wrong."

"Humph!"

But things didn't go wrong. Like snakes, Barker and his companion, a mere kid, bellied their way across the gap beneath a blazing sun that sent the sweat trickling down beneath their flannel collars. And they came to Creeps Copse in the stillness of midafternoon.

Not a leaf stirred. They found the beaten trail—the trail that many a man before them had taken to his doom. Once recognized, however, and Barker shunned it as if it were plague-stricken. He gestured to the kid, back of him, and side by side they slunk into the undergrowth.

"Look at that," whispered Barker and his companion swung about, mechanically, throwing his bayonet to the on-guard.

"Where?" he asked with startled eyes.

"There," said Barker and he indicated several huge butterflies of brilliant coloring which winnowed overhead. "If I only had my net."

The kid gave him a withering look.

"I'm through," he said. "I'm goin' back. I guessed they named you right, mister," he muttered, as he shoved his Enfield ahead of him.

Clawing an opening in the weeds he waddled through like a hog going to pen. After awhile the sounds of snapping twigs died out.

Barker was alone. Minute after minute he lay on his back staring up at a blue sky across which an occasional plane streaked its shimmery way. The heat made him drowsy. He watched the circling butterflies till his head grew dizzy. Presently he dozed.

It was dark when he woke up. He came to with a start. For a moment he couldn't place himself. But he looked up ahead and there, outlined against the big, yellow moon he saw the ghostly shapes of the five stubs of the wood. Right then his ears caught the whistle — soft, short, but a whistle, unmistakably. Barker's ears pricked up, and he spun the cylinder of his .455 to insure its readiness. Another whistle—the same, low warble. Bugs Barker counted five of them—he was certain of it—before the copse again enveloped itself with deathless quiet.

Funny, judged Barker, and he racked his brains for an interpretation of the whistling. Signals? Those unseen ——, maybe? Close at hand, that was certain. But where? Hour after hour Barker sat in his cramped position, staring into the blue-black haze of night, the hammer of his gun easing his finger on the sensitive trigger. After years, it seemed, the first, faint streaks of day dragged in with the scream of a shell-salvo from some Vimy battery ripping up the sky to the slag-heaps beyond Saulaumines. And again Barker, crouching there, heard the soft whistling of the previous evening and he was conscious that shadowy somethings were rustling up in front of him. But he could make nothing out.

The sun had climbed considerably higher before he got out. Then he snaked away as he had come. Slipping over the trench-block he found the C. O. confronting him.

"Where the —— have you been Barker?" demanded the C. O. "Not child's play again, I trust."

To Barker it was apparent that his kid companion of the previous day had opened his mouth.

"No, sir. If the truth will out I went to sleep."

"——!" The C. O.'s disgust was painfully evident. "Went to sleep, eh? Too bad you took the trouble to wake up."

"Sorry, sir," said Barker. "I have to report though that those Fritzies visited the wood again last night."

And he told his story. The C. O. puffed his smelly pipe in meditation.

"But hearing them isn't getting rid of them," he declared. "Division has been quizzing us for an hour now on what we've done. We'll just have to suggest something—to save our face."

Presently he sent two runners hustling to Division, via Brigade, with the suggestion that all front-line troops be withdrawn that night to their support lines and that Creeps Copse be heavily shelled.

That evening, there ensued the funny spectacle of Canadian guns deliberately belaboring a piece of their own front line. For a steady hour the wood of weird things rocked in agony beneath the lash of high explosive. And the morning came, and with it, reoccupation of the trenches forward and an inspection through innumerable glasses of the havoc wrought.

"Tough old stubs, those," commented Bugs Barker. "Still standing. Wait! I believe one's had a big chunk knocked off the top."

The C. O. appeared disinterested.

"What's on for today, Barker?" he asked.

"I'm doing a little reading," was Barker's reply.

"Reading?"

"Yes, sir," said Barker. "An old, worn book I bought in Bethune—frightfully interesting—all about the monks——"

"You'd better not let Fisher see you with it," the C. O. put in, "or he'll make a monk-key out of you. He's coming in tonight. Can scarcely hobble—but won't take 'No!' for an answer. He says Creeps Copse has got to be cleaned up, that it's your prescribed job, and that you're bungling things. You won't stick much longer with him, Barker, if you don't knuckle down."

"Yes, sir," said Barker solemnly.

But he went back to the dug-out and occupied his attention with his book and the many little sketch-maps that ran through its pages.

True to threats Big Bill Fisher landed in late—at dawn. He refused all offers of assistance and half-tumbled down the stairs to the dug-out.

"Want Barker," he said sharply.

Bugs Barker at the moment was using his binoculars from the trench-block.

"That's funny," he reflected. "Yesterday I was sure that a big sliver had been knocked off that one stub. Maybe I was—was wrong, though."

Behind him he heard the C. S. M. call out—

"Wanted at headquarters, sir."

Barker went down the duck-boards, feeling that something was in store for him. And there was. Big Bill took him down a couple of pegs ending with:

"I'm fed up with you—absolutely. I've had the sergeant-major pick a fighting patrol of twenty men, Lewis gun, bombs and all. You'll take that crowd—it's my final say to you—into Creeps Copse tonight and clean it up or get cleaned up. Get me?"

"Yes, sir," was the unruffled reply.

"What's that?" asked Big Bill.

Barker had drawn from his tunic a ragged-edged bit of reading matter—his Bethune book.

"Something that may interest you some."

"Spill it."

Barker gave his suspicions to Fisher in short order. For fully five minutes the big fellow sat motionless—a study in slow, serious consideration.

"They might get through that way," he finally breathed.

Turning to the chalk-wall he took down his harness, his "gat," "tin-lid," and respirator, all of which he draped about him.

"You say, Barker," he queried, "that we can get over there now? Well, I'll take a look with you, but remember, tonight's the night."

Big Bill had a lot of trouble dragging his feet after him but by dint of much panting and perspiring he kept up with Barker. The need for caution was fully understood and they pulled their bodies through the slashed and battered copse with the stealth of Hurons. This time Barker followed the beaten trail. It led them to a small clearing where, before them in a half-circle formation, towered the five stubs. Barker threw a casual glance skyward, then dropped his eyes with a sharp whisper to Big Bill.

"Keep your head down."

Big Bill "dead-dogged" as warned. Once out of the clearing they dived into the undergrowth and hunched down.

"What's up?" whispered Big Bill.

"The top part of that stub is—is covered—with butterflies."

Fisher gave vent to his disappointment with a straight-arm that sent the bugologist flat on his back. The latter pulled himself up, nursing his cheek where Big Bill's broad palm had caught him. But he serenely went on—

"And why are those butterflies there?"

He seemed to be studying the question himself.

"Please, teacher, I don't know" snapped Big Bill, inclined to ridicule.

"Well—I've got a hunch."

"Shoot—and make it snappy."

"The top of that stub—is *new*."

"New," said Big Bill, his eyes open wide.

"Yes! New—since the artillery strafe.

"How d'you figure it?"

"No time to explain now. Later. We've got to act 'toot-sweet.' "

"The 'tooter the sweeter,' " grinned Big Bill.

Over churned-up ground, through brambles and loose branches which, whipping up, brought tiny red welts to their faces, the two officers sneaked their way to a point from which they commanded better observation. Crouching there in the sun, they spotted, to their amazement, little dazzling flashes of light emitting from a cavity near the top of that stub on which the butterflies had clustered.

Now on—now off—now on—now off were those flashes.

"Lord!" ejaculated Big Bill. "Helio, I'll bet."

"I think you've guessed it," said Bugs Barker, face as expressionless as ever.

"We'll stop that," said Big Bill coldly.

"Right away," said Barker and he spun the cylinder of his gun.

Very deliberately they back-tracked.

"Regular coon hunt," whispered Big Bill as they negotiated the last foot to the clearing.

"Let's hope there's but one coon to deal with," declared Barker, and he blessed his lucky stars when their dash across the open space to the base of the tall stub induced no German gun-play.

"So far, so good," said Big Bill as they pressed their bodies against the blackened shaft.

Bugs Barker's eyes had fastened on an opening in the stub, head high.

"Made to order," he enthused momentarily.

Turning to Big Bill, he said—

"Pull some of that dried grass and let me have a few pages from your message book."

Once in his hands Barker jammed the stuff in the opening. He put a match to it and got a good blaze going. They looked heavenward for evidence that shortly manifested itself. From the top of the stub faint rings of gray smoke lifted and cleared.

"Hollow tree," said Big Bill. "We'll smoke *him* out."

Barker nodded and fed more fuel to the crevice.

Came a sudden, heavy scraping sound that stiffened Barker to the alert. Big Bill, bent down for more grass, was totally unprepared for what followed. The side of the tree fell away noiselessly. A gray-garmented Fritz shot out as though propelled by springs. In his hand he gripped a long-barreled Luger. Quick as a flash he swung the muzzle to the middle of Fisher's back.

But a pistol butt thumped him behind the ears and lean fingers fastened on his throat the very instant his trigger-finger twitched. Big Bill Fisher felt the air ripple near his ear—the slug had missed him by an inch—and he heaved about to see the Fritz flat on his back with a wild man atop of him. The Hun was crying "*Kamerad*," as best he could, but Barker was plying his fists with abandon and was having no "*Kamerad.*"

The business of trussing the Fritz up occupied but a few minutes. Tossing him to one side the officers next busied themselves with a close examination of the tree. They found it heavily sheeted with steel within and a ladder of the same stuff running all the way to the top. Up there a platform had been installed. On it a miniature heliograph had been set up.

"No wonder," said Big Bill, "that Division's been up in the air about the deadly shooting of German batteries. Why—the fellow up this tree has been sun-flashing back to them the slightest shift of position our guns made. No wonder they've been knocked out."

"I'll wager the rest of these big stubs are steel, too," said Barker.

Examination of the others confirmed their suspicions. Threatened with speedy removal to the happy-hunting-grounds, the captured Fritz coughed up and demonstrated the manner in which the German garrison got into their ambush stations, and the operation of the shutter-slits from which the Luger lightning flashed.

"Can you beat it?" said Big Bill. "They likely figured the ambush stuff would keep us out of the wood and thereby take our attention off the observer chap—yonder—who, likely, has been a pretty valuable man for them."

Bugs Barker again waved the blue barrel of his Smith & Wesson beneath the Bavarian's nose. Again the prisoner wilted and guided them a few yards beyond the semicircle of trees where the swamp—pond, some may have called it—began to show. They pushed out a short ways and found a big tube-thing projecting from the muck. It was covered with camouflaging weeds which they dragged away.

Bugs Barker lowered himself within and found his heels clanking on another ladder. "Go easy, boy," cautioned Big Bill, as Barker's head disappeared.

But the bugologist popped up shortly.

"Only went a little way," he stated. "But there's a fine old tunnel down there under our feet. That's how Fritz has gotten over here every night. It probably runs right over to his line. Great hiding-place."

A detail of Engineers led by Big Bill and Bugs Barker went into the wood later that morning. And they worked hard and by the time the shadows were lengthening their job had been done. Beneath each steel stub with its spring door, three "flying-pigs" had been buried. The tube-thing in the swamp had been mined too. One push of the button and everything would go.

By twenty hours the moon was riding high. Big Bill and Barker, hidden near by, waited for the signals. Shadowy somethings rustled up ahead. Soft whistling!

"Those —— are in place now, I guess," said Barker.

Together they backed away.

On the edge of the wood they hooked up with the C. O. and the Engineers' detail.

"All set?" asked the E. O.

"All set," said Big Bill.

"Duck—when I let her go," advised the E. O.

And with his push of the button the little group ducked—hit the dirt with hands clapped to their ears. There was a great roar. A mighty wind seemed to leap up from nowhere and strike their faces. Jagged tongues of flame leaped skyward. The ground shook beneath their bodies. Long after the orange glow had faded from the sky debris continued to *zzzz* and *zooom* down from the star-studded vault.

The lightning would strike no more.

"WE ARE pleased to report," the "Comic-Cut" carried it next day, "that the Creeps Copse situation has been cleaned up. Thanks to the enterprise of Divisional Headquarters the trouble has been extirpated."

But little Division knew of Bugs Barker's Bethune book that told of the life of the ancient order of the monks of St. Laurent—of their persecutions—and of the network of underground passages they built—some in the Mellicourt country—as havens of refuge from nobility, who drove them desperate.

And, at the time, little they knew of Bugs Barker. But they were to know of him, for temperament once more stirred in the make-up of Big Bill Fisher and he sat himself down and swallowed pride and resolutions of long standing and wrote a recommendation for the Military Cross which Division subsequently O. Ked and which the butterfly chap would later wear.

And the Elegant Eleventh finished their tour and went back to the sun-baked Villers country. And Fisher's particular brand of wine came up from Bethune and they made a big night of it.

"Those butterflies, Bugs? How 'bout them?" Big Bill asked during a momentary lull.

"Those on the stub?" answered Barker.

"Yep! You said you'd explain how they put you wise to the nigger in the woodpile."

"Well," said Barker quietly, "back home we sometimes go after specimens—moths and butterflies, you know—in an odd way. On warm nights we smear a tree-trunk with some sticky, sugary stuff and the specimens trap themselves on it.

"That piece of stub—the part Fritz rebuilt after the strafe—had been painted or varnished to conform to the color of the rest. And as luck would have it the sun made the varnish run and the butterflies—that Creeps Copse was full of them, remember?—got caught in exactly the same way as those back home.

"Soon as I saw them, I said: 'Something funny.' For sap doesn't run in September, nor from dead stubs, and the butterflies wouldn't gather there under ordinary conditions. So there you are."

"Huh," mused Big Bill Fisher. "Some head behind those goggles after all."

And when the red wine was flowing strong he put his foot in the middle of the Doc's banjo and stopped Frankie and Johnnie's love affair. Then, raising his glass on high, he bellowed—

"To Bugs—and butterflies."

And the Beer boys drank their glasses to the dregs with a resounding—

"Here's how, old bean!"

A lump welled up in Barker's throat and, unobserved, he slipped outside. He felt glad, though. He knew the meaning of that toast. He was a Beer boy, now—one of the splendid order of the *Tried*.

Behind him he heard a step. He felt a paw settle on his shoulder. He knew instinctively it was Big Bill's.

"That you, Bugs?"

"Yes, Bill."

Big Bill hemmed and hawed. Finally he got it out of him.

"A fellow's foot slips," he said, "once in a while, and sometimes he says something he shouldn't. I've never apologized in my life, Bugs. Don't know how, I guess. But I hope—I hope you'll understand—about your mother. Get me?"

"Yes, sir," said Bugs Barker, the faintest of smiles creeping to his face. "Perfectly, Big Bill," he said, and stuck out his hand.

Big Bill shook.

THE HOLLOW MAST

by Charles F. Emrich

WE'D warped the *Clydelad* into dry-dock as soon as her cargo'd been discharged. She needed scrapin'; one of the blades in her propeller was cracked; she was to have new boilers and her engines overhauled—so, altogether, it was to be a matter of ten-twelve week lay-up, and everybody was paid off. But the old man stayed aboard; and he kept me with him because I'd done his cookin' for the last twenty years.

He was gettin' old, the old man was, and a bit captious. He'd always been curt and peppery in his speech, but I think that was mainly because he took command when he was so young, bein' but thirty-four when he became master of an East-Indiaman. That was when you seldom saw smoke on the sea, while there were sails a-plenty; but the old man'd been smart enough to see that steam was the comin' thing, and he quit the master's berth in a fine full-rigger to take the port watch in a smudge-pot.

He went ahead fast, too, just like he'd done in sail, and before long he was made skipper of the *Clydelad*. But his heart was still set on real masts and yards and sails; so, when we found the *Tuwallah* abandoned and driftin' off Ushant and the old man brought her in, he took a bit of the pretty penny of salvage money he got and bought the *Tuwallah's* forem'st for the *Clydelad*. A tall stick of steel that forem'st was, with five yards: fore, lower and upper tops'l, t'gallant and royal, with sails bent and ready to set; and the old man'd have the canvas sheeted home whenever the wind was right for him.

Tommy Carew came aboard while we were in dry-dock. That youngster had Yankee written all over him. He was uncommonly tall, in the loose-jointed, flexible length of him; and his eyes were steady with the same directness that marked the thin line of his mouth and that made his chin look as if an adz had hewn it out of green oak.

"Is the old man aboard?" he sang out the moment he took his foot off the gangway.

"He's ashore," I answered, "and won't be back till evenin'. Are you lookin' for a berth?" For it was plain that he was a sailor.

"That's what I want." And the way he said it you'd think it was his for the askin'. "I'm goin' as third."

"It's quite certain that you'll get it," I said, thinkin' his assurance needed takin' down a bit. "With the ship in dry-dock, the old man'll want you to keep her on an even keel."

He let that pass; but with those steady blue eyes of his searchin' me sharply, he asked—

"Have you been in her long?"

"Ever since the old man took her over," I said.

"Then you were with him when he salvaged the *Tuwallah*, eh?"

"The Hollow Mast," copyright, 1924, by Charles F. Emrich.

"I was with him," I told him. "And that's her forem'st. The old man bought it from the underwriters, bought it for the price of a herrin'. And a fine mast it is."

"And the *Tuwallah* was a fine ship," said he. "My father was her skipper, and never would have abandoned her. But he was killed when she was wrecked, and the first, takin' command, took the crew off in the boats."

The spinnin' of a good yarn was in prospect, so I asked the young man for his name and then brought him to the galley. We had dinner together, and while he was tellin' me his story I got to likin' him more and more. For all his cocksureness, his voice was rather quiet and his manners pleasin'.

"I'll be goin' now," said Tommy, "and I'll be back this evenin' to see the old man."

"Here's wishin' you all the luck in the world." And I meant it. "But don't make fast to the hope that you'll get the third's berth. The old man's a bit offish when it comes to hirin' foreigners for his crew; and if you do get it, well, you'll be the first officer not an Englishman to cruise on the old man's bridge."

"I'm not particular," he said to that, and he smiled real pleasantly. "I'll take the berth for all that."

That's the way you Americans are, I thought, amazin'ly thick when it comes to findin' the point. Said he wasn't particular, and that he'd take the berth for all that. My word! As if I'd meant it that way. And I don't know what he did that night to overcome the old man's prejudice; for he came aboard the next mornin', a porter fetchin' his sea chest behind him.

He was on deck a few minutes later, his shore togs stowed away, ready to take up his duties, and asked me to show him the paint locker.

"There's a streak of rust in the foretopm'st," he said. "I'm goin' aloft and daub it over."

"That's a fair way to win the old man's heart," I told him. "He's uncommonly fond of his yards and sails, and the mate who shows a proper interest in them'll be the old man's darlin'."

"I know every rope and block on them," he said, "and I'll see to it that they're kept in shape."

With that he swung himself into the port shrouds and went up the rat-lines as nimble as a squirrel.

* * *

WITH no crew aboard and the old man away a good part of the time, Tommy and I were together a good deal. In the evenin' we'd go ashore; and I found it hard to keep up with my mate in the spendin' of money. Now it was a bit of carved ivory, and then again it might be a handsome fan or some such matter, but for the triflin' thing he'd sell, Tommy'd always get a smashin' good price.

It was fair puzzlin' to me where he'd stowed all the things he sold and how he'd kept the customs' officers from findin' them—for it was certain that he'd smuggled them in. Now and then I'd make a deft turn in our conversation and throw a hint or two regardin' the things he'd sell, but Tommy was astonishin'ly dense in catchin' my drift; and I found out nothin' until the *Clydelad* was nearly ready to leave dry-dock.

"With proper handlin'," said Tommy—we were havin' our supper in the galley—"this ship can be made to pay a good return."

"She's been doin' that ever since she left the ways," I told him. "She can show a neat profit for every trip she's made."

"For the owners," said Tommy.

"To be sure," said I. "If ships are run to pay a profit to those not ownin' any ships, I've not heard of it."

"But it can be done in this case," said Tommy. "That forem'st is a money-maker, but not for the owners."

"The forem'st of this ship?" I asked him.

"The forem'st is hollow," explained Tommy. "It's a tube and——"

The old man had come for'ard and stood in the galley's doorway.

"Mr. Carew was tellin' me, sir," I said, "that the forem'st's a tu——"

I stopped then, for Tommy's boot hit cruelly hard against my shin-bone beneath the table, and I yelled with the pain of it.

"Cook's havin' his twinges of gout again, sir," Tommy's voice was as bland as a baby's, "and I was tellin' him that the forem'st was too much out of plumb. She's listin' to port, sir, but with a little settin' up of the starboard shrouds, she'll be as right as ever."

"See to it that they're set up, Mr. Carew," snapped the old man.

Then he told me what he wanted for his supper and went ashore.

I'd rolled up the leg of my trousers and was lookin' at the shavin' of skin hangin' loose.

"What was that for," I demanded, bitter angry.

"You should have been kicked overboard," said Tommy. "Here I want to put you in the way of makin' a bit of money, and then you go and spill the beans—" that was his way of speakin'—"the minute I take my hand off your gab."

"You said nothin' to me of makin' money for myself," I denied. "You were sayin' that the forem'st was hollow."

"And 'tis not the only hollow thing aboard," he grinned. "Now if you'll promise to keep what I'm goin' show you to yourself I'll let you see the little gold mine."

The *Clydelad* carried her anchor chains well aft of the bows, with the forem'st runnin' through the partition separatin' their lockers. Tommy took me into the starboard locker and showed me the entrance to the mast. The tube was a big one, for the *Tuwallah* had been a five-thousand tonner, held together by two rows of rivets. One of the rivets was a blind; it was really no rivet at all, but just a threaded shank, with the head of it lookin' like that of a rivet. The bolt came out like a screw, and then you could put a finger through, push back the latch that held the section in place, and the whole plate came out. There was just enough room then for a man to squeeze through, into the finest smuggler pocket in the world. The pocket was a good one; no customs' officer would have thought of lookin' for it.

I took the lantern and went inside the mast. A Jacob's ladder hung down from above, and at the foot of it lay the secret of Tommy's deals in curios and the like. A goodish bit of the stuff was still there, and it came to me that many a gold sovereign was yet to find its way to Tommy's pockets by means of that forem'st.

The top of the ladder was bent to the fork of the foreyard. A neat bit of lashin' held down the cap of the forem'st, and, with the cap off, there was a way of enterin' or leavin' the mast from above or below, as the situation might demand. Altogether it was the neatest pocket imaginable, and I told Tommy so when I came back to him.

"I've used it ever since I built it," he told me. "When we abandoned the *Tuwallah* I had to leave behind all the stuff you just saw. But I got in touch with the underwriters and learned that the *Clydelad* had shipped the *Tuwallah's* forem'st. I've been goin' it alone so far. I want a partner because its safer and more profitable. The chance is yours."

I took it. It was no easy thing for me to take my savin's out of bank, a matter of three hundred pounds, and to risk the money in such a venture. But I did it, and Tommy put in a like amount. He had the handlin' of the money, and a rare bargainer and a shrewd buyer I found him. He'd find flaws in the goods or other reasons for askin' reductions. A close observer and a persistent cajoler, he was the hardest customer that ever distracted a merchant. Sometimes that quiet but sharp voice of his would go in an endless stream, and then again he could keep still in all the languages in the world; and he proved as good a bargainer when it came to disposin' of our goods.

The *Clydelad* ran a regular route. From Liverpool to Saigon, then to Sydney and back to Liverpool, she'd made the same run for years; and in those years I'd become acquainted with many chandlers in the three ports. In Saigon we sold everything we had, and my three hundred pounds had very nearly doubled. In a couple of months we'd made more than two years' pay. The lot of it went into the purchase of silk, and with that stowed away in our hidin' place, Tommy celebrated the result of our venture with a box of cartridges. A sampan took us down the river a way, and Tommy used his Winchester on flyin' gulls. Every time he'd pull the trigger, down came a gull. My word! He was a good shot, Tommy was.

You would think that twelve hundred pounds' worth of silk was a trim bit of cargo in itself, but that big pocket wasn't filled nearly to capacity. And Tommy'd driven good bargains in buyin' it, too. Flowered embroidered silk of the finest quality he'd bought, the kind that carries a heavy duty and always fetches a good price in England. That's what we left Saigon with when the *Clydelad* got under weigh for Sydney.

The *Hypatia* came in while we were there. She was a fine liner, the crack ship of the fleet, carryin' passengers between England and Sydney, and she belonged to our company. We hoisted the blue peter two days before the *Hypatia* was to sail, but we knew that she'd overhaul us and that she'd be in Liverpool before we'd make fast in Port Said to fill our bunkers. And in the meantime it would be well not to run foul of the old man.

The *Hypatia* was the finest ship of the fleet, and the old man should have had her bridge under his feet; he was entitled to her by the right of seniority, seamanship, the rule of the sea and everythin' else. But Captain Treadleigh was related to Lord Weydham, principal owner of the line, and so Captain Treadleigh got the ticket. A good enough man for the job, too; but the old man had been bilked out of his crib for all that.

There was a hitch in gettin' the last bit of cargo aboard. We left the pier to drop down away, to where a lighter was to bring the remainder of the cargo to us. We let go the starboard anchor and down it went, with fifty fathoms of chain—and that was the last we ever saw of either chain or anchor. It's hard to say just how that shackle unshipped its pin, but the old man berated the first as if he'd done it on purpose. The old man was peppery anyway; but now, with the smell of the *Hypatia* still in his nostrils, the hard words spouted from him like water runnin' from lee scuppers.

It took him ten minutes to tell the first what he thought of an officer who'd let anything like that happen; and Mr. Blodgett took it without sayin' a word—what else could he do? But when the old man left the fo'csle-head, the first passed it on to the third. Tommy got a terrible tongue-lashin'. He stood there as stiff as a bar, his face turnin' color until he was deathly white. When the first tapered off a moment to get his breath for another delivery, Tommy's voice cracked out like a splittin' sail.

"Very well, Mr. Blodgett," he said, "the fault is mine. But if you say another word to me about it, I'll spread that beefy face of yours all over the deck."

In Singapore I'd seen Mr. Blodgett tackle three Lascars with knives in their hands, and he had only his fists. He whipped the three, and came away without a scratch. But he took Tommy at his word and lay off him; for the lad's eyes would have cowed a mad bull.

With the starboard anchor gone, they used the other. The lighter brought the last bit of cargo, the port anchor came up, and the *Clydelad* stood out to sea with neither anchor nor chain on her starboard bow.

THE fourth day out, up came the *Hypatia*, dead astern. She came up fast, the bone in her teeth cuttin' the smooth lane of our wake. If you'd run a line from our foretruck to the main and then continued dead astern with it, it would have touched the *Hypatia's* forem'st. And that's what you might call uncommonly good navigatin', and the old man was as pleased as Punch to think that a liner followed his reckonin' so closely.

The *Hypatia* sat well up out of the water; you could see her a long way off. We'd sighted her about seven o'clock in the mornin'; by ten she was close abeam, and at one o'clock she slipped under the horizon, dead ahead.

Seven hours later, eight bells had just gone and Tommy was steppin' into the galley for his mug of coffee, when the chief tore through the passage on his way to the engine-room. Tommy cocked his head to one side, and, sure enough, the telegraph clanged out loud. Then Sparks hurried by, he'd just handed the old man a message, and without slackin' up he flung back over his shoulder that the *Hypatia* was sendin' out the S O S.

The old chief crowded the *Clydelad* hard that night, and in less than four hours we were close enough to the *Hypatia* to see that she rode deeper than she did that mornin'. She was makin' no headway, but rode on an even keel. Every light on her was burnin'; and suddenly they all winked out together, as if the same switch controlled them all. The water had reached her fires.

There was just a mouthful of warm breeze. The full moon held straight above us, and the sea was as still as a bucket of water as we stood by, to starboard of the *Hypatia*; and from off her port bow a big steamer was comin' up fast. Then Captain Treadleigh sang out, askin' the old man if he'd come aboard. The old man went, and when he came back he told the first that the *Hypatia* was fillin' fast—one of her plates below the Plimsoll havin' given way. And he also told him that the *Hypatia* was carryin' a consignment of gold, a good bit of it, with a value of more than two hundred thousand pounds. Captain Treadleigh had been wirelessin' with the steamer comin' up on his port bow, said the old man. She was the *Teneriffe*, bound for Melbourne, and she was able to take the *Hypatia's* passengers as well as her crew, if enough of the *Hypatia's* stores were shipped over to feed them.

That was the thing to do, rather. The way the *Teneriffe* was reachin' out she'd have the shipwrecked people in Melbourne in less than four days. She was faster than the *Clydelad* and of more tonnage. If we'd taken the *Hypatia's* people on the *Clydelad*, we'd been compelled to run back to the nearest port with them; so Captain Treadleigh must have decided to put them on the *Teneriffe*, for the night was still and we could hear them breakin' out the *Hypatia's* stores and the whirrin' of sets of block-and-tackle told us that they were bein' hoisted on deck.

She was beginnin' to look like a ghost, the *Hypatia* was. There was not a light on her, but the moon made her stand out as clear as day. She was ridin' deeper all the time, and it was curious to see how straight she sat in the sea, with her three masts as straight up and down as if she'd been made fast to her pier in Liverpool.

Her high white superstructure stood out sharp from the dark reaches of the promenade deck, and the moonlight glinted dark against the black of her port-holes. All her passengers were in the boats alongside. Now and again you heard a woman pray, but quietly, the still night floatin' her voice across the water like a church bell soundin' from far away.

Pretty soon we heard the rush of the ripples as the *Teneriffe* pushed the water out of her way. Clusters of light threw a strong glare all over her; she was shinin' like a merry-go-round at a fair.

Our boats, too, had gone over the side, to bring the gold aboard. To let the *Teneriffe* take it to Melbourne and then to transfer it to another ship bound for Liverpool would have cost the company time and money. Besides, the *Teneriffe* would have been entitled to a pretty penny for salvagin' the gold; and, as it was, the old man would get a neat little check from the underwriters or from the house, perhaps from both.

This wasn't the first time the old man'd come to help a ship in distress, and, though he'd never asked it, of course, he'd always gotten a good mouthful of clean gravy from the other chap's burnt mutton. In some ways he was very lucky, the old man was.

With the gold on our deck, the blocks were hooked into the boats to be hoisted into their davits. When the boat of the *first* came flush with the railin', out stepped four Chinamen; one of them a tall, quick-movin' man with a pleasant face and gentle manners. He was dressed like a mandarin, in fine yellow silk, and the peacock feather was in his cap. The other three were coolies; they were the Chinaman's servants.

The old man's eyes blazed with anger. He wanted no passengers, and his words would have discouraged most people. But the tall Chinaman kept beggin' for passage, offerin' the old man such a scandalous amount of money, over and above the price of four first-class tickets, that would have tempted a spendthrift—and the old man was anything but that.

And the Chinaman gave the old man a good many reasons just why he had to be in Liverpool within a certain time, his voice smooth and pleadin' and yet full of dignity. He said it all in as good English as anybody wanted to hear, with that soft deep voice of his pleadin' like an old priest before his altar, and with his coal-black eyes glowin' soft and dark in the light of the moon.

And then the first chimed in. He said that he wouldn't have brought the gentleman if Captain Treadleigh hadn't pronounced him such an expert at chess. And that finally settled it. The old man was most fond of the game, and the only one aboard to give him a fair tussle was the chief engineer; but he was so full of asthma that the old man couldn't abide his wheezin'.

The *Hypatia* lay very still, her deck deep a-wash. Every soul had left her; there wasn't a sound from the whole big ship. She was goin' down quickly now, the water reachin' up for her railin' so fast that you could see her slip down and down. But she still sat up straight, as straight as an ensign would sit at his captain's dinner table. She didn't slip on her keel until her promenade deck was under; then she began to list to port, her mast-heads tippin' toward the *Clydelad*. She kept capsizin' until she lay flat on the sea, the water rushin' into her big funnels, thick flakes of soot swirlin' out of them. Bottom-up she came, and for a moment the moon silvered the green growth along her keel and bottom plates. Then she sank like an anchor.

WE GOT under weigh again; and in the evenin' Tommy stepped into the galley for the mug of strong black coffee he was so fond of.

"Our passenger," I said, "has a noble way of showin' his appreciation. Handsome presents for the officers and the engineers and a five-pound note to every member of the crew—I call that noble."

"He was very anxious that not a man should be slighted, wasn't he?" Tommy said. "But I'm sure he got them all. Everybody stepped up and got his present."

"To say nothin' of the kind words that went with them, and the handshake," I reminded Tommy. "A most affable gentleman."

"He asked the first two-three times to make sure that every soul aboard had received a gift, and then checked off his own list against the purser's pay-roll," Tommy came back to what seemed to have most impressed him.

"He has an effective way of makin' friends," I said.

"And his eyes never left the face of the man before him," Tommy'd noticed. "Seemed to study him, kind of, as if he wanted to remember him; and then his words were such that the man would have to say somethin' or other in reply."

And then I suddenly remembered that the Chinaman had held Tommy longer than anybody else.

"You seemed to come in for a good deal of that, Tommy," I said, "and I thought you were rather chary in answerin' him."

"Oh, I hope I didn't offend him," said Tommy, and he seemed deeply concerned about it."

"That you didn't," I assured him. "But I thought you might have drawn it out a little. Civil you were, to be sure, but you didn't seem overly impressed with his generosity. And that, too, after he'd given you that pretty bit of ivory."

Tommy'd gotten a tobacco box. It was small, but wonderfully inlaid with gold and jewels; a really handsome present, and the passenger'd been impressed with the fine tall figure before him and with the bold alert face of him, that was plain. He'd put many questions and had tried in other ways to gently force Tommy's talk, but in that he'd failed. That was Tommy's way; pleasant, yes, with a quiet little smile, but when he was so minded he could keep still with the same persistence that others used in speakin'.

Tommy left the galley then, and that same evenin' I saw him and the Chinaman cruisin' the bridge. After that they were together a good part of the time, and it was evident that Tommy tried to be more companionable.

The passenger seemed deeply interested in the course of the ship and the change in her position from one noon to the next. When the old man'd verify the first's reckonin', the Chinaman'd be leanin' over the chart with close attention, and it was plain that he was not unfamiliar with the science of navigation and with the ways of a ship at sea. He and the old man played chess much of the time, and though the old man never won a game he seemed willin' to lose to such an expert.

He was well contented to have the Chinaman aboard, so when, that was the passenger's fourth day aboard, Sparks reported that the wireless had gone wrong and that he couldn't locate the trouble, all the old man did was to snap out that a good operator wouldn't let his instrument break down, and if it happened anyhow, that a good operator'd be able to right the matter. The Chinaman asked Tommy if he thought the jammin' of the wireless a serious matter, but Tommy laughed at that and said he considered it of little importance.

He complained to me that same night that he was unable to sleep.

"Then let me give you a mug of tea," I suggested. "The strength of the coffee you drink would keep a watchman awake."

"Let's have another mug of it then," he said, a bit slow to catch my meanin'. "A watchman! That's a good idea, cook."

"It's the other way about," I told him. "You shouldn't drink coffee at all, my lad. Leave it alone, if you want to sleep."

But by that time he'd gulped down a second mug, and then he shoved his hands deep down into his pockets and went out. However, I noticed that he didn't turn in, though it was his watch below. He went for'ard, and I saw him mount the ladder to the fo'csle-head and then lost sight of him.

Early the next mornin', on my way to make breakfast, I saw one of the coolies leavin' the galley. He was carryin' a pot of tea; and that was proper enough because the old man had told me to let the coolie use the galley at that time of day. The

Chinaman was in the habit of havin' tea very early in the mornin', and one of the coolies prepared it for him.

But when I started to make breakfast, things weren't so proper. Out of the mess of bread I'd baked the day before, four loaves were missin'; a big tin of corned beef was gone, as well as several tins of peaches, a box of biscuits and a couple of pies. But when I told the coolie about it he let go all the pidgin English he had in denyin' that he knew anythin' about the stuff. Of course you'd deny it, I thought, and keep right on stealin'. The only thing to do was to lock the cupboard at night.

I had met that coolie just after the second had turned the deck over to Tommy, maybe five-ten minutes after four o'clock in the mornin'. Then Tommy came in for his coffee, as he always did in the beginnin' of his watch. But that mornin' he drank four mugs of it; drank it strong, black and unsweetened; never a word out of him, lookin' as if a deal of trouble was weighin' him down.

"How was it with the sleep last night, Tommy?" I asked.

"Not a wink," he grumbled most disagreeably.

That's the way he left the galley, and ten minutes later that terrible yell from him tore through the ship like the cry of a man gone mad. The helmsman sang out, "Man overboard!" and put the wheel hard over. By the time he'd telegraphed "Full astern" to the engine-room, a sailor'd run up the ratlines to keep Tommy in sight. But he never saw him.

A boat went over the side, searched all around for thirty minutes and then the old man called it back. For a time the *Clydelad* lay quite still; then the crew assembled amidships, with the old man readin' a prayer for Tommy Carew; and with the unnatural hush always brought by such an occurrence the ship slowly picked up speed on her way back to Liverpool. Just then a single atoll raised itself out of the sea, a couple of points off the port bow. It was Kwang Tsau Island, which is almost barren and used only by a gang of Chinese pearlers.

The matter went into the log as it was seen by the few witnesses. Clelland, the man at the wheel, said that he saw Tommy sit on the railin', well up for'ard, just abaft the bows. He said that Tommy was sittin' quietly, with his head between his hands, noddin', kind of, as if he'd been cat-nappin'; and that all of a sudden he just seemed to slide off and yell out loud. Clelland said that he'd heard the splash as Tommy struck the water.

Paisley, the second, said that Tommy'd acted queer when Paisley'd turned the deck over to him, and that Tommy'd complained of bein' ill and that he hadn't slept durin' his watch below. From the accounts of Clelland and the second, it looked as if Tommy'd dozed off while he was sittin' on the railin' and fell overboard.

And that Chinaman! Well, if he'd been Tommy's own father he couldn't have been more affected. You don't often see Orientals makin' a show of their feelin's, but this one was terribly worried because Tommy'd gone overboard and hadn't been found, and he didn't seem to care that his anxiety was apparent to the whole ship.

The old man explained that Tommy'd probably struck the stem as he fell and that he'd gone under the keel dazed or unconscious; but the passenger had Clelland and the second go over the whole thing again and again, and seemed unable to believe it even after the whole occurrence had gone into the log over the signatures of the witnesses.

WITH it all, and because of the way I felt about it, it was later than usual when I went aft that mornin'. The officers and the engineers ate in the same mess, the old man always havin' his meals alone in his quarters, and every day I'd ask him what he'd have for his dinner. His quarters were aft, clear across the stern of the ship, and they were good ones. A big sittin'-room, a chart-room, which he called his office, and the bedroom just aft of it and the bath.

I knocked on the door of the chart-room, but the old man didn't answer as promptly as he generally did. When he finally did sing out, I went in. One of the coolies was there, and the minute the door closed behind me he crossed the room with the swift sure tread of a cat and put his back against the door. He said nothin'; his left hand was hangin' slack, but the right was hidden in his tunic.

The old man was sittin' in the bedroom, his left hand lashed behind him, his feet made fast to the bottom of the chair. Another coolie was holdin' the point of a long knife against the old man's throat. The Chinaman, dressed in fine embroidered silk and with the peacock feather in his cap, was standin' by, a long cigaret between his fingers.

"Tell him," said the Chinaman to the old man. "But speak quietly."

But the old man never raised his eyes. He was fair dead with the shame and the humiliation of it all. His red face had gone white. He'd let his head drop for'ard so his chin touched his breast.

Then the Chinaman spoke to me. He was very pleasant, and that deep voice of his was as unruffled as the sea on a quiet day.

"Mr. Blodgett has been sent for," he said, "and your knock upon the door was taken for his. Under the circumstances, I hope you will not expect me to permit your leavin' the cabin."

With that he cut a fathom-length of flag halyard from a coil and seized my hands—and I knew that if I'd as much as opened my mouth to sing out, that coolie'd drive his murderous knife home, right through the old man's throat.

The first came in while I was bein' tied. He did raise his fists and let go a short bellow, and I thought his face would burst with the rage grippin' the man. But he held the leap he made for the Chinaman—what else could he do? The knife at the old man's throat was a fearful thing to see.

Then I saw why the old man's right hand had been left free—he used it to write a request for the presence of the officers and the engineers. And they came fast enough, for it wasn't safe to linger when the old man called. One by one they came, the officers, the engineers and finally every member of the crew; came and were made fast as the first and I'd been served.

And the tyin' itself was a fine bit of deviltry. The Chinaman made us hold our hands behind the back, the fingers of one hand between the fingers of the other, like you'd hold your hands at prayer. Then, with the half of a towel, he'd wrap the folded hands snugly, runnin' the cloth well back over the wrists, and lash the wrists together with a len'th of thin halyard. With his hands tied that way, none could work at the fastenin's of his neighbor. You can't untie any kind of a knot while you're wearin' mittens.

With all of us as helpless as blind tomcats, the Chinaman took the knife from the coolie and himself held it at the old man's throat. Then he gibbered somethin' to his helpers, and they searched the old man's quarters, the rooms of the officers and engineers and the fo'csl, the coolies comin' back with a couple of rifles, a few revolvers and a good many knives. The whole collection went through the porthole.

That Chinaman was careful and thorough. He'd studied the face of each man as he'd tied him; and now he released the chief, a couple of firemen and as many sailors, the five of them bein' the least aggressive men on the ship. The coolie had again posted himself beside the old man, and then the Chinaman told the chief to lead the way to the engine-room.

A few minutes then, and the vibration told that the *Clydelad* was under weigh again; but the tremor was so slight that we judged her to be makin' no more than three-four knots. After three hours of this we heard the anchor go down, and by the length of chain runnin' out we knew that the hook lay in fairly deep water.

"We're done for," said the first. "She's anchored off Kwang Tsau. They'll take the gold ashore; and that yellow beast'll murder us all. Dead men tell no tales."

The for'ard winches clattered an answer to the first's prediction—the gold was bein' hoisted out; and the clearin' away of the boats followed immediately.

The Chinaman brought back the men he'd released and made them fast again. Then he lashed our feet together—but we knew that that baboon-faced coolie of his would have sent the long knife clean through the old man's throat if one of us as much as lifted a foot to kick the Chinaman in the belly. We had to take it; and, when he got through, the Chinaman took his coolies on deck with him.

The old man's cabin was well filled that day. From himself down to the messroom boy, every member of the crew was there, lyin' flat on his back, his hands made fast behind him and his feet lashed to those of his neighbor. We couldn't even get up—though some of us tried hard enough when the chief told us that he'd been forced to open the sea-cocks just before the boats had gone over the side and the gold lowered into them. However hard the men may have tried to cast off their fastenin's then, there was little said; but there must have been a deal of silent speculatin' as to how deep the ship was ridin' at anchor, her sea-cocks havin' been open for the last hour or so.

No, there wasn't much said. Now and then a little noise'd break the silence when somebody'd try to roll over or to free himself. But we'd been made fast by a man who knew how to do it, and every man must have realized that we were to drown like dogs in the pound. The sound of the oars pullin' away from the ship was growin' faint too; and finally the real silence of the sea spread itself over the *Clydelad*.

Then came that awful yell. "Yoo-hee!" Loud and sharp and clear, as thin as a high-pitched whistle and as piercin'. It was still goin' through us like a sharp blade when the crackin' bark of a rifle stuck us, and three more shots came so fast upon each other that it was hard to tell them apart. A few seconds then, and there was the swift thuddin' of runnin' feet on deck. A figure blurred the light in the open doorway, bounded through; and Finley, the old bosun, howled in the agony of his soul. For, in the middle of the floor, his rifle in his hand, stood Tommy Carew.

THE *Clydelad* was again standin' away for Liverpool. Kwang Tsau was under astern. The old man'd finally gotten through with Tommy and I had him with me in the galley.

"He seemed such an affable, generous gentleman," I said. "How'd you come to suspect foul play?"

"He'd already paid a scandalous price for his passage, hadn't he?" Tommy explained. "Then why should he hand out five-pound notes and handsome presents? He did that so's to know every man in the ship; so's to make sure that not a soul'd get away to spill the beans."

"But you wouldn't take such a chance at drownin' just because he gave presents," I objected.

"There were other reasons, plenty of 'em," said Tommy. "That Chink kept his eyes closer to the chart than the old man did. I watched him and saw him use the dividers in spacin' the distance between our position and that barren atoll used by a Chinese colony in their pearlin'. Then, when we got within a day's run of that atoll, the wireless gets jammed. I'd seen the Chink go into the wireless room when Sparks was at dinner, and when he went back on duty he reported the apparatus out of commission."

"And you went over the side early the next mornin', Tommy," I mentioned. "How'd you get back?"

"I'd rigged a rope through the starboard hawse-pipe—you remember, we'd lost the hook in Sydney," Tommy told me. "So the hawse-pipe was free. I passed the rope through from inboard, and the free end of it was in my hand when I went over; all I had to do was to hand-over-hand it up the rope and through the hawse-pipe to the chain locker, and then into the forem'st. I didn't know just how long I'd have to stay, so I laid in a stock of stores. The gun went along, of course."

"Then it was you who took all that food from the galley that night," I said, "and I blamed one of the coolies for it. Well, he was innocent of that, anyway; but why did you shoot them all, Tommy?"

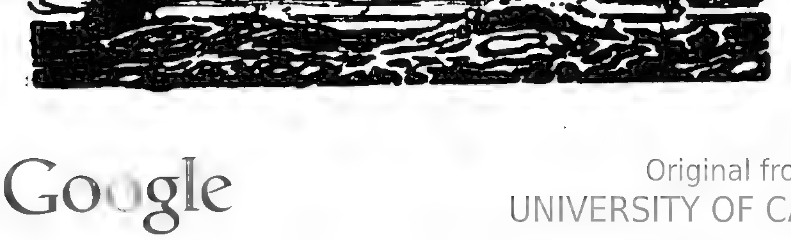
"'Cause I couldn't take a chance," he explained. "They might have plugged me while I'd be shinnin' down the stay to get to the cabin. Besides, it took only four shells. I got the whole fleet in four shots."

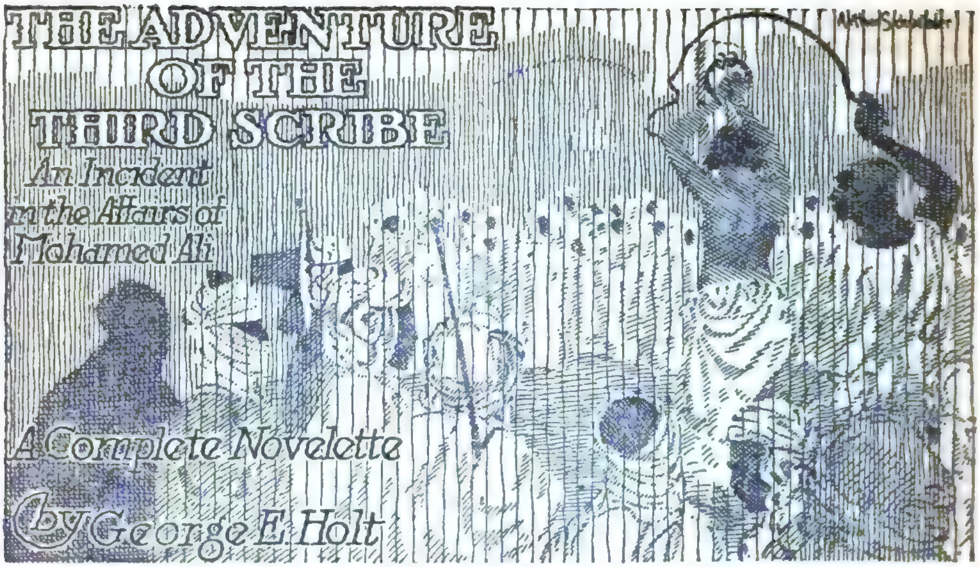
"Did the old man say anythin' about a reward for salvagin' the gold?" I asked him.

"He says that we can claim five per cent. by law," said Tommy. "But he thinks they'll make it more, 'cause the company would've surely lost the ship, too."

"Well, Tommy," I congratulated him, "five per cent. on two hundred thousand pounds—that's a pretty bit of money."

"So it is. Besides, there's the profit on the silk we've got in that forem'st," said Tommy Carew.





THE ADVENTURE OF THE THIRD SCRIBE

An Incident in the Affairs of Mohamed Ali

A Complete Novelette

by George E. Holt

Author of "The Adventure of the Captain of the Guards," "The Adventure of the Second Scribe," etc.

MAMUN, who had been Third Scribe to Mohamed Ali, rode in the moonlight along the narrow trail which leads from Arzila to El Arache. East of him, like a purple sea, stretched the undulating, treeless plains of northern Morocco; from the west came the gentle snores of the sleeping Atlantic; and ahead of him, just visible as silver shields in the moonlight, the rounded turrets of the citadel of El Arache.

Mamun urged his horse. Both beast and rider were tired, for they had made sixty miles, halting only for water. But least tired of the two was the lithe rider, whose scant black beard proclaimed his youth, and whose flashing black eyes his spirit. A call for a rendezvous among the Atlas foot-hills had come from his chief Mohamed Ali. The summons had reached him when he lay in hiding in a little village near Tangier, but hot upon its heels had come another call which he could not ignore—a message which told of grave danger to the sister he loved, and perhaps to his aged mother. Wherefore Mamun had set off at once for El Arache.

Now the matter which drew the feet of the Third Scribe to that city, instead of to the Riffian village wherein Mohamed Ali awaited his coming, was not of recent birth. It was another chapter in a story which had begun several years before; a story which had made for Mamun a malignant enemy of Sid Ali Kebbour, then the basha of El Arache. And the first part of that story was this:

Mamun, at that time not yet having been discovered and taken up by Mohamed Ali, was an unimportant and unassuming young man, who lived quietly with his widowed mother and fourteen-year-old sister, in the brick-walled city of El Ksar. His father being dead, Mamun, young though he was, wore the turban which marked him as the head of the house, and the protector of his mother and sister Azalaya.

Those who knew Azalaya sometimes called her Breath of Spring, or Reflection of the Moon, or Pearl of Delight—but always with a tone of jesting, so that the girl should not become conceited, and might retain that womanly humility which is so desirable in a wife. Not that those who thus called her were men or boys; besides her brother and one uncle, no man had ever seen her uncovered face or heard her voice. Those who jestingly told her of her beauty were women, who should know, if any one does, whether conceit is bad for a woman or not.

But although the face of Azalaya was hidden from all but two men in the world, the tongues of some of the women who knew

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her wagged indiscreetly. Whereby words came to the ears of the wolf who dwelt in the governor's house in El Ksar, Sid Ali Kebbour the basha. And from the moment that he heard of the incomparable beauty of the virgin Azalaya, one evil compartment of his mind was filled with thoughts which betokened no good to the sister of Mamun.

In due time these thoughts took form, with the result that upon a certain night three men, who had some of the basha's gold in their *shakaraks*, set out for the house of Mamun for the avowed purpose of seizing and carrying away to the basha the girl Azalaya.

Fate, however, had been kind to Mamun's sister, for one of the basha's hirelings, having drunk, in his affluence, a little of the forbidden wine, had talked too much in a coffee-house owned and operated by a good friend of Mamun.

Thus it came about that the kidnapers found only a darkened and vacant house. But at the same time a guard at the basha's palace was carrying to his master a miserable, flee-bitten hound which, in some mysterious manner, had gotten within the palace gates, and which bore, attached to a rude collar of gaudy ribbons—Mamun had taken this measure to insure that the dog should not be summarily driven out—a message addressed to the basha.

His Excellency raved with rage when he read the message—which politely informed him that it was the writer's opinion that His Excellency would more enjoy the companionship of one of his own kind and station rather than that of the sister of the writer—Mamun. And he had raved still more wildly when on the following day he discovered—through friends and enemies—that a copy of the message and a brief explanation of it had been posted upon the principal gate of the city, for the entertainment of the multitudes. He did not need to be told of the ribald laughter with which the citizens were shaking—for he was not altogether a fool.

Nor did Mamun need to be told that he had made an enemy who would seek revenge so long as the basha's heart should function. Wherefore he had placed his mother and Azalaya in hiding, and he himself had joined the person of Mohamed Ali. And Sid Ali Kebbour had later become basha of El Arache.

II

THE summons which had come to Mamun at his hiding-place near Tangier had brought lines of worry to his face, sadness to his eyes, and granite to his jaw muscles. It was a message which had come from his sister by the hands of a camel-driver—a short message, but a terrible one.

> My brother (Azalaya had caused to be written), come to me at once. A friend of the basha has learned of me and seeks me. We have refuge in the house of Achmed ibn Khader for a little, but he also is in danger. Come then—or Azalaya dies.

Rocked by the menace which hovered over his sister, and knowing that only the most desperate situation would cause her to reveal his hiding-place, Memun had seized the camel-driver by the neck of his filthy *djellaba* and had tried to shake from him facts which he of the camels did not himself know.

"*La, sidi,*" he wailed, resisting with friendly force the efforts of Mamun, "nothing more do I know than that the girl Azalaya gave me the letter to bring to you, and told me where to find you. That I have done: I can do no more. But, if I were you, Sidi, I should go swiftly to El Arache — guarding myself carefully — for there was misery and fear in the eyes of the girl Azalaya."

Brought to his senses by this advice, Mamun had lost no time in following it. In a little space his horse was carrying him along the trail which winds over the hills south of Tangier. For safety's sake the *koob* of his *sulham* was low upon his face. For safety's sake his belt hung heavy with two pistols. But for Azalaya's sake he dared the open trail in the glare of the afternoon sun. And few men, looking into his eyes, would have attempted to stop him.

Thus he rode swiftly from Tangier to Arzila ere sunset, swiftly from Arzila to El Arache in the gray hazy evening and purple moonlight—and now the silver shields of the citadel gleamed above the high black walls and turrets. Sinister indeed was the blackness of these ponderous walls, and, looking at them, Mamun breathed his sister's name as a prayer—

"Azalaya—Azalaya——"

Now, in El Arache, as in all Moroccan fortified cities, the great gates were closed at sun-down, and thereafter those who desired to have them opened for entrance or departure needed either to be known to the guards as one of importance, or else must satisfy the custodians of the portal that the unbarring and unlocking of the massive creaking doors was right and proper. Had Mamun arrived before sunset it would have been a simple matter for him to pass through with the throng which—this being market day—had congested the gate from daybreak to evening prayer. But now it was necessary for him to ride alone, conspicuously.

He knew that his command would bring about the opening of the little door within the greater one—a door just big enough for a pedestrian to go through—not sufficiently large for a horseman; that to his face the tin candle-lantern of the guard would be lifted inquisitively; and that any effort to conceal his features would arouse prompt suspicion. The guard might recognize him—if opportunity were to be given. Although the chances were against this, he felt that he could afford to take no unnecessary risk: He must pass hurriedly, without affording time for the guard to look closely; must so disturb the guard that his wits would be confused.

Wherefore, when he was a few hundred yards from the gate, he dug spurs into his horse, and the tired beast leaped forward at a gallop. Reaching the gate Mamun, without dismounting, pounded loudly upon the door, shouting:

"Open! Open at once that I may pass! I come from the governor on business with the basha. Open!"

On the other side the door a guard who had been half-asleep from the effects of his long *keef*-pipe, but who had heard the hurried hoof-beats, threw back the small door, lantern in hand. The pungent smell of the *keef* was upon the air.

"The gate! The gate! Open the gate, fellow!" shouted Mamun. "Have I raced my horse from Arzila on government matters to be kept waiting by a guard who is drunk with *keef!* Your master shall hear of this. Open! Or shall I?"

Mamun made as though to swing from his horse. But the guard, befuddled by *keef* and the commands and haste of this night messenger, turned and lifted the great oaken bar from its sockets, and turned the foot-long key in the ponderous lock.

"Nay, *sidi*, I will open; I will open," he cried. "The *keef*—thou understandest, oh, *sidi*. It is lonely here at night, and none come—and besides, I had a pain in my back which the *keef*-smoke lessens."

The great gate swung back.

"Pass, *sidi*. And—and wilt thou have the goodness to say nothing to the basha concerning the smoking——"

His words became lost in the clatter of hoofs upon the cobbled street. Sparks flew from the stones, and horse and rider were lost in the shadows. The guard replaced the bar, turned the great key, and, squatting upon the ground in a little recess by the gate, considered his *keef*-pipe. After a little he filled it again and lighted it.

"*Aiwa*," he observed dreamily, after a deep inhalation, "*Aiwa*—it is good—for a pain in the back."

III

SWIFTLY Mamun rode to the house of the friend where Azalaya and her mother had taken refuge—a little square white house in a small garden near the southern wall of the city. No lights showed, nor did any one answer his call. Going to the door, Mamun found it standing open. At this his heart jumped: it was a sinister omen, for in Morocco people do not leave their house-doors open at night—and not often in the daytime. Mamun struck a match with shaking hands, and found a candlestick.

Even in the faint light given by the match, he saw still other signs of evil import—an overturned tabouret, cushions lying out of place, a torn turban-cloth—and a girl's slipper. When the candle caught flame, he picked up the slipper from the floor. A glance sufficed to show him that it belonged to his sister, that it was one of a pair he had bought for her upon her last birthday. With a little cry of "Azalaya," he thrust it into his *shakarah* and, candlestick in hand, began a search of the house. He found additional evidences of a hurried departure—of a forced departure—either as captives or as fugitives. And in the kitchen he found the body of a man, who was very dead indeed.

He returned to the room where he had found the slipper, and was standing lost in thought, with grim face and set jaws, when a sound caught his ear. Swiftly he drew his pistol and turned toward the door.

"Do not shoot, Sidi Mamun," said a voice. "It is I, Mustapha, the son of Achmed ibn Khader."

Mamun lowered the pistol, and a boy entered the light.

"Mustapha!" cried Mamun. "Where is Azalaya? Where are the others—my mother, your father? What has come about? Why are you here alone?"

The boy, a lad of perhaps fifteen years, with intelligent face and keen eyes, came a step nearer to Mamun, and in lowered voice made answer.

"I am here alone, Sidi Mamun, because I ran away when men came, not more than an hour ago, and overcame our people. Not that I was afraid—that was not the reason—but to try to get aid. But when I returned—alone—the townsfolk are dogs and cowards!—the house was empty of all. All but one, that is—one remained, without doubt to examine the house for valuables, for him I came upon with his head in a box—very quietly I came upon him—and used the knife you gave me once when you were pleased with me."

"Allah!" exclaimed Mamun. "In a little while you will be a man—a man for Mohamed Ali, if Allah wills."

"I am already a man," said Mustapha promptly, "for I have killed my man."

"That is a true thing," agreed Mamun.

"And as for Mohamed Ali—" went on the boy—"if he be in need of men——"

He laughed a little at his impertinence. But he grew serious again as he looked into the worried face of Mamun.

"In the meantime—after my knife had done for the seeker of treasure, I went forth upon the trail of the others."

"And where went they?" Mamun's face was hard. He feared that he knew the answer to his own question, at least so far as his sister was concerned.

"They are confined in one of the houses of Sid El-Halk, the dog who is friend to the basha: The little house near the Bab-el-Fahs; not the one in which Sid El-Halk lives."

"So!" Mamun's face cleared. "That house I know well. I feared that they had been taken to the basha's palace."

"Not yet," said Mustapha. And, with considerable perspicacity for one of his years: "No doubt Sid El-Halk is making a bargain with his master. It is said in the market-place that he has fallen from favor of late."

Mamun looked thoughtfully into the eyes of Mustapha for a long moment.

"In that case," he began, but did not conclude his thought. Instead— "Let us walk a little, that I may think upon this."

He extinguished the candle, and, with his arm about Mustapha's shoulders, set out.

IV

IN HIS supposition the boy was right: El-Halk, like all men who cater to the evil side of a master, had found that the wage for such service constantly grew lower and lower, and the appreciation less and less. He was not intelligent enough to realize that no man, however depraved, desires about his person, for more than a little while, one who thoroughly understands the extent of this depravity, and who serves it—unless that man be an equal in rank. Sid El-Halk had become a bad smell even in the nose of his master. Wherefore it was with a very sincere thought of thanks to Allah that he had accidentally come upon information concerning Azalaya.

The story of Mamun and the basha was well known to him, and thus he believed that he saw the way to satisfy the basha's revenge against the Third Scribe, give him the girl he had so greatly desired, and, so far as he himself was concerned, obtain from the basha a final gift which would enable him to shake the dust of El Arache from his yellow slippers and seek residence and profit where he was less known.

He was quite aware, however, that in order to accomplish that which he desired for himself, he must act without the knowledge of the basha, up to a certain point. Did the basha know what he himself knew, soldiers would go and seize the girl—and Sid El-Halk could cry in vain for largesse. To avoid this he had employed a few ruffians whom he knew to take captive the girl and her friends, to carry them to the little house by the Bab-el-Fahs, and to guard them there while he played what he sincerely hoped would be the last game with his master the basha.

In this manner it came about that Sid Ali Kebbour, the basha, gave ungracious orders to his slaves to admit Sid El-Halk into the chamber where, having finished his evening meal, he was taking his ease upon the cushions and smoking English cigarets.

The basha was a fat man, brown-bearded, with a double-chinned evil-lined face, and his eyes were the eyes of a vulture. They were not kindly as they looked upon Sid El-Halk—and they caused a little shiver of doubt to crawl up and down his spine, and a little sickness in his stomach.

While Sid El-Halk and the basha sat thus, and talked of matters which narrowed the eyes of the latter, but which also strengthened his desire to dispense with the sight of Sid El-Halk for all time, matters were moving swiftly in other quarters.

The Third Scribe and Mustapha had walked in silence for a while—until to Mamun had flashed a plan which caused him to stop abruptly, to smile a little to himself—a grim, tight little smile—and to ask of Mustapha—

"Has not Sid El-Halk a daughter?"

"Yes, *sidi*. Only yesterday she arrived from a visit to friends in El Ksar."

"She is of about the age of my sister, is she not?"

"Yes, *sidi*—or so I believe," replied the boy. "But she is very ugly, it is said, as the result of an accident to her face. Which is the reason, it is also said in the market-place, that she has not been added to the *harem* of the basha. That her father would sell her if he could do so is certain."

"You are sure that she is ugly?" asked Mamun.

"So it is said, *sidi*. Although I myself have not seen her—I have heard the words of those who have."

"Allah smiles upon us then," said Mamun softly. "As He always smiles upon right and frowns upon evil. With His aid we shall not only save our own people, but shall punish others. It will be just retribution! Let us now go swiftly to the house of my friend ibn-Malek, and secure such aid as we need. That will not be much—two, perhaps three, good friends who are not afraid—for no doubt Sid El-Halk—the curse of Allah upon his evil heart!—fancies that *his* family sleeps in safety."

V

AN HOUR later three men and a youth, and a white bundle mounted upon a mule, passed swiftly from the residence of Sid El-Halk to Sid El-Halk's little house by the Bab-el-Fahs, leaving behind them a friend who guarded the helpless household of the basha's friend. As they turned into a little garden one challenged them.

"Friends of Sid El-Halk," Mamun made quick answer. "With another beautiful one for the master. Where shall she be put?"

"The *sidi* is busy tonight," said the guard with a rasping laugh. "Saving his worthless head, no doubt. Oh, put her with the others, inside the house."

Two other fellows now came out of the shadows with drawn pistols in their hands and inquiries in their mouths; but a jest from their companion quieted them. They put away their weapons and listlessly observed the newcomers as they set about taking their captive from the saddle. And then, before their eyes could bulge in surprize, each found himself looking into a pistol-barrel and being asked gently whether life was worth its living. They were men of sense if not of honor.

"Who is Sid El-Halk that we should die for him?" said one, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Assuredly he is no friend of mine."

"Nor mine," observed another.

"Besides which, we have half our pay—and the other half is not important—in the circumstances," added a third.

"*I*," said Mamun, "will pay the other half. How much was it to be?"

A sum was named and the clinking of coins followed.

"Moreover," continued Mamun, "Our *djellabas* are, I think, better than yours. We will exchange, as an additional gift."

The exchange was made, couple by couple, under the watchful eyes of two pistols.

"It is manifest, of course, that you must now be tied up for a little while," said Mamun, and speedily the trio was deposited in the obscurity of an orange-grove a little distance away.

This being done, the white bundle was taken from the mule and carried to the house; a key taken from one of the guards grated in the lock, and very shortly Mamun had cut the cords which bound his mother and sister and their friend, Achmed ibn-Khader. In five minutes more Azalaya was riding swiftly to safety in charge of a friend—and in less than another five minutes Sid El-Halk and a basha's slave rode up.

Now it is possible that Mamun's plan would have failed if Sid El-Halk had been in less haste—which is to say, if his master the basha had not cursed him thoroughly and ordered Azalaya brought in the shortest possible space of time—or if the moon had not sunk so low in the sky that its light was no more than a pale shadow.

"Bring the girl at once," he ordered.

Quickly this was done.

"Tie her to the slave's saddle."

The white bundle was lifted to the big saddle and made fast.

"Let the others wait until morning—but guard them well. Come, Ismail."

With that Sid El-Halk started off, followed by the slave leading the second mule. But his mount had taken only a few jangling steps when it was swung about.

"I had forgotten," observed Sid El-Halk, mostly to himself. "I shall need another man for a while." At Mamun he pointed. "You, fellow, come with me."

"But — but — *sidi* —" began Mamun, taken aback by this unexpected and undesired turn of events.

"Come, I say, fellow," snarled Sid El-Halk. "Who are you to argue with me? Have I not employed you for this night?"

Suddenly red anger shook him and he drew a pistol from beaneath his *sulham*.

"Run you at my stirrup," he growled, "or by Allah you will never run at another!"

VI

SO MAMUN had been thinking in lightning flashes. The rôle he had assumed, of hired ruffian of Sid El-Halk, forced him to obey the order. Refusal would probably mean that he would be shot down, that his identity would be discovered, and that pursuit of Azalaya and the killing of his friends would be set about at once. He might fight, might kill Sid El-Halk and the slave, but if either managed to escape, the sleeping town would be in an uproar in five minutes. Azalaya had only a little start; his mother and ibn-Khader were still in the house. And the noise of shooting would bring city guards running from the gate.

"I have digged a pit," he said to himself grimly, with a shrug of his shoulders, "and Allah Himself knows how I am to get out of it." And then: "I come, *sidi*. I did but hesitate because I wondered if there would still be guards enough left here. I come."

"Good, then," growled Sid El-Halk, turning his mule; but he kept the pistol in his right hand.

Mamun ran toward him, stopped to whisper to one of his own friends—"Take the others to Mohamed Ali, in the Riff—" and, seizing a stirrup, trotted along beside his enemy.

Behind him came the slave, with the white bundle. That they were on their way to the basha's residence Mamun had no doubt. But whatever Allah might have in store for him, that he must accept in order that his people and the friend who had suffered to protect them might have time to get beyond pursuit. Scarcely a quarter of an hour had elapsed since Azalaya had gone—and the others could no more than have started. Mamun's spirit smiled grimly; assuredly the pit was of his own digging. And in ten minutes at most enemies who knew him would look upon his face. His face! Concealment was impossible—impossible—or—was anything impossible? A thought came to him.

"Fool! What ails you! Whoa! Quiet!"

This from Sid El-Halk, partly to his mule, partly to Mamun, who now rolled upon the rocky ground, after having nearly pulled the saddle from the beast in a sudden fall.

"I—I stumbled, *sidi*." Mamun got to his knees, whimpering, with both hands held to his face. "*Ai! ai! ai!* I am hurt. I struck my face upon a stone." The words came brokenly. "My jaw is broken. Your mule stepped upon me. *Ai! ai!*"

He found no sympathy in the heart of Sid El-Halk.

"Get up! Clumsy fool! Have I time to waste upon you? Your head shall be broken next."

Awkwardly Mamun rose, one hand upon his jaw.

"I come, *sidi*, I come," he muttered. "Only let me tie a piece of my turban about my face. It pains me."

"Do that as we go," growled Sid El-Halk. "I have no time to lose." He motioned ahead with his pistol and dug his square box-spurs into his mule's belly.

As he ran beside the mule, Mamun unwrapped a length of turban from his head, tore it off and wound it about the lower part of his face, securing it in a big ugly knot under his chin. Then, slipping his concealed *kumiah* from its sheath, he made a little cut in one arm, and with the blood which came, smeared the bandage and his face. A little later he scooped up a handful of dust and added it to the blood on face and arm. Then he smiled as he ran; there seemed to be little probability that any one would now recognize, beneath the dirt and blood and bandage, the always immaculate Scribe, Mamun.

Shortly they turned into the courtyard of the basha's residence, and came to a stop before the door of the house.

"Bring the girl," commanded Sid El-Halk gruffly, as the door was opened for him by a guard stationed there.

Mamun and a slave lifted the helpless white bundle from the saddle and carried it between them into the house and into the room where a somewhat drunken and ill-tempered fat basha reclined upon his silken cushions.

"Wait now outside," ordered El-Halk, when the girl had been stood up like a white mummy before the basha.

VII

MAMUN and the slave withdrew to the adjoining anteroom, closing the door after them. Mamun noted grimly that a guard had followed them into the palace and now stood at the entrance way. But though the door was of wood, it failed to confine the voices of the basha and Sid El-Halk. There was a little space of silence. Mamun reflected that the worthy friend of the basha was removing the girl's wrappings. Then came an excited cry in the voice of El-Halk, and Mamun judged that the cloth about the girl's face—a precaution for silence—had been removed. Now the words cut through the door as a knife cuts through fresh cheese, and tragedy came about almost before those who listened had time to think.

"Dog of a dog!" It was the basha's voice. "Dog and offspring of dogs! Do you jest with me? With *me?*"

Came a girl's cry, followed by a shriek from El-Halk.

"Do not kill me, *sidi*. Oh—oh—do not kill me! I have been tricked." There was the sound of slippers running. "*Ai! ai! ai!* It was indeed Azalaya——"

"Fool! Dog! Again—and in this way—you bring your ugly offspring before me? Now—now—" There came a smothered howl, followed by a girl's shriek. "Now I will show you if you can make a fool of me. Thus——"

There was the sound of a falling body.

"And as for you," continued the basha, "go before I kill you also— No, remain. There is something I would learn."

Now Mamun realized in full the danger of his position. That the basha intended to interrogate the servants of the late Sid El-Halk—if they should be present—was made obvious by his words. For the fatal result of his game he had not the slightest regret; he himself would have killed El-Halk without compunction and in doing so would have felt that he had acquired merit. But he had not known, could not know, that wine had aroused a fiend in the basha, to drive him mad when it seemed he had been tricked and insulted. That Sid El-Halk would receive the basha's anger had been a forgone conclusion—a result planned for by Mamun when he had substituted El-Halk's daughter for Azalaya. And that Sid El-Halk, upon discovering his own daughter under the white wrappings, would make inquiries of him was also to be expected; and for these inquiries Mamun had his answers ready.

But now that El-Halk was dead, and the basha was to be the inquisitor—and considering the fact that by this time Azalaya and the others would be away from El Arache and upon the road to safety, if Allah willed—Mamun felt that it was in order to make an attempt to save himself. Wherefore he walked without haste toward the door, nodded his head to the guard there, and was about to pass him unmolested, when the door of the basha's chamber was flung open, and a voice roared—

"Stop that man!"

The game was up; Mamun halted and turned about leisurely, as one would stop and turn who heard a call but was not sure it was for him.

"Were you with Sid El-Halk?" demanded the scowling basha.

"I was, Your Excellency," replied Mamun—of necessity.

"Bring him into my chamber," ordered the basha to his guards.

In the room stood the daughter of El-Halk, and in one corner lay the quiet form of her father.

The basha looked at Mamun.

"Take off that bandage," he commanded. "I have no one in my presence whose face I can not see."

"But—I was injured, *sidi*—by the mule——"

With a snarl the basha jerked the bandage down away from the face. Then his eyes grew large and protruding and his mouth opened a little, and his chin sank down into the roll of fat beneath it.

"*Allah kerim!*" he exclaimed then. "Mamun! Now Allah be praised for His goodness. All is made clear." He cast a quick look at the silent figure in the corner, shrugged his shoulders and twisted his lips in a cynical smile. "His death was pleasant, compared with what yours shall be." And to the guards—"Bind him."

Then upon the daughter of El-Halk he turned his gaze, his eyes narrowing.

"I had her stolen, Your Excellency," offered Mamun. "She is in no wise a party to the trick."

"*Hmph!*" snorted the basha. "I am no child. Your presence makes all clear." And to the girl—

"Go away—and if you love life never let my eyes see you again."

Whereupon Sid Ali Kebbour, basha of El Arache, turned his attention back to Mamun. For a little space he gazed at him between slitted eyes and his hands trembled with the power of his visions. Then he began a sentence, but bit it off at the second word; words, he realized, could tell Mamun nothing that he did not know.

But for his guards he had instructions.

"Take him to the Sultan's House. Lock the door and bring the key to me. Place guards at the door; if he escapes they all die horribly. But unless he can pass through stone and iron, he will not escape. Go!"

"But—Your Excellency—" said Mamun quietly. "Why do you not end it now—as you have with your friend, Sid El-Halk?" There was scorn, and something else in the slow words; Mamun was throwing the dice for a quick death instead of torture.

"Does a dog kill quickly?" snarled the basha. "It was you who once called me dog. *Allah!* Like a dog, when the time comes, I shall tear you to pieces. But that time shall await my pleasure. I would not—have—it—too—soon. Take him away."

VIII

IN AN ancient olive-grove crowning a summit in the foot-hills of the north Moroccan Atlas, three men, wrapped in white *sulhams*, sat and watched a copper sun sink behind the purple hills. The shadows, racing upward from the valley, enfolded them. Then all arose and turned toward the east; each spread a little colored felt prayer-rug upon the ground. Each removed his yellow heelless slippers, crimson fez and snowy turban, and placed them before him, just beyond the rug. Then kneeling, three Believers touched heads to earth and repeated a sunset prayer to Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate:

> *"Praise be to Allah, the Lord of all creatures; the most merciful, the King of the day of judgment. Thee do we worship, and of Thee do we beg assistance. Direct us in the right way, in the way of those to whom Thou hast been gracious; not of those against whom Thou art incensed, nor of those who go astray."*

The last red sun-rays sent a trio of shadows speeding eastward in the True Direction, like arms reaching illimitably for their object, like souls surging toward their goal. The bodies which knelt were only symbols; faith sped on shadow wings in pilgrimage to the Holy of Holies.

The *Fatihat* finished, the worshippers resumed seats upon the ground, squatting cross-legged. At a little distance thatched-roof cottages peeked at them above a hedge of aloes and cactus, and from that direction came smells of cooking and the innumerable little noises of a village.

For a little while all sat in silence, their faces serious, as faces should be which have just looked upon God. But at last one spoke—a big, brown-bearded man.

" 'Direct us in the right way,' " he repeated. " 'In the way of those to whom Thou hast been gracious.' This is sunset of the seventh day—and no word has come."

"No word, Mohamed Ali," agreed another, a man as big as Mohamed Ali himself. Dark of face, with bushy black beard and flashing eyes beneath inky brows, was he who had been Captain of the Guards when Mohamed Ali was basha. "No word. Wherefore—" He paused in thought.

"Wherefore, Djillali, *I* say it is time for action." Thus offered he whose right cheek bore a white crescent-shaped scar. "Let us make plans at once."

"And so say I, Sid Aidomar," endorsed the captain. "If Mohamed Ali, and Sid Aidomar his *khalifa*, and Djillali, his Captain of Guards, are not sufficient to rescue our friend from the basha of El Arache, then, in the name of Allah, let us become priests and call the five prayers from the top of a mosque—a mosque which Mohamed Ali himself shall build for us!"

Laughter greeted this.

"The idea is not such a bad one after all," said Aidomar the *khalifa.* "I think that I would make a very good *mueddin.*"

"No doubt, no doubt," agreed the captain. "You have a powerful voice, which is all that is needed—except to be able to read the Koran," he added with grinning impudence.

But the voice of Mohamed Ali cut the talk short.

"That we must do something is manifest," he said slowly. "I agree with you that we three should be sufficient for the basha—but the basha has troops in El Arache at his command. Wherefore force—or much force—would be inadvisable. Our wits will be our best aides I think. But the time for action has come—and I, for one, am at a loss: We know not precisely what has happened, nor what we have to overcome."

Every face grew serious now, for business was at hand—the business of rescuing from gravest danger their friend Mamun, who had been Third Scribe to Mohamed Ali, and whom they now believed to be a prisoner in El Arache, of his vicious enemy, Ali Kebbour, the basha.

"Would that Sid Hamed and Walid M'Barak were here, instead of in Fez," said the *khalifa.* Those of whom he spoke were the First and Second Scribes, now in the northern capital of the country on business of importance to Mohamed Ali.

"Three are enough," offered Mohamed Ali, "when two of them are the *khalifa* and the captain," he added smiling. "And besides—we will let the others know of our plans, when we have decided upon them. Fez is not a great distance from El Arache. Now—here is an idea; let us consider its value."

Mohamed Ali's smiling compliment to his friends was by no means undeserved, as the record of recent events in the Shareefian Empire clearly showed. When Mohamed Ali had been basha of Tangier he had had as his immediate subordinates five trusted associates, two of whom now sat with him. When his enemies had gained the upper hand, and he had had to fly from Tangier for his life, he had entrusted to each of these friends some part of the archives or seals or treasures which he must preserve were his enemies ever to be overthrown and he himself to regain power.

Each had made his own escape, in his own way, taking with him those things which had been entrusted to his especial care, to await the moment when Mohamed Ali should call a rendezvous. That call had gone forth, and in answer to it four had sought Mohamed Ali in his haven among the Atlas foot-hills. Each had come to account for his trust—and each to tell tales of being face to face with death at the hands of their enemies.

The last to arrive at the little Anghera village had been the black-bearded Captain of the Guards, with a tale of having been walled up in the city wall of Azila. It was he, also, who, having met Mamun riding to El Arache, had brought word from him that if nothing further was heard of him in seven days, his friends should take such steps as they might think advisable.

IX

THE conference between Mohamed Ali, the *khalifa* and the Captain of the Guards was broken into abruptly by the arrival of a villager escorting an old woman, a girl and a swarthy-faced man in a brown *djellaba.*

"Allah!" exclaimed Mohamed Ali. "That old woman I know. She is mother to Mamun."

He and the others rose. The two women stopped at a little distance and their escort approached.

"I am ibn-Khader, of El Arache," said he of the brown *djellaba,* "and I bring to the safety of Mohamed Ali's protection, the mother and sister of his Third Scribe.

"That protection is assured," replied Mohamed Ali. "But what has happened to our Scribe?"

"Alas, *sidi,*" answered ibn-Khader. "If he is not here he must be a prisoner of the basha of El Arache. *Ai! ai!* And perhaps worse."

"Sit," ordered Mohamed Ali, "and let us hear the tale. We know that our Scribe, Mamun, went to the city of El Arache upon personal business of importance, but what matters were concerned we know not."

"This matter, Oh Sidi—" answered ibn-Khader, seating himself cross-legged at a respectful distance from Mohamed Ali, and pulling the skirt of his brown *djellaba* over his knees—"concerned Azalaya, sister to Mamun, the Sid El-Halk—whom I will call friend of the basha instead of a more truthful name—and the basha, Sid Ali Kebbour; also, indirectly, the mother of Azalaya, and their friend, myself. With your permission, *sidi*, I will smoke; my old body is weary from the hardships of such a journey—and the danger."

He filled his long-stemmed pipe with dusty *keef*—a potent mixture of tobacco and Indian hemp—and inhaled deeply as he held a match to the bowl.

"Now, as you no doubt know," he then continued, "a few years ago this same Ali Kebbour, who was then basha of El K'sar, became aware of the existence and beauty of Azalaya—and greatly desired her."

"That I have heard," assented Mohamed Ali. "Also that he sent certain of his men to seize her in her home. And still further, that Mamun, having learned of the plan, took his sister to a place of safety—and then delivered to the basha a worthless dog—as being a proper associate for His Excellency."

Smiles greeted this remembrance.

"That was an insult to the hound," observed ibn-Khader impassively. "However—that was the beginning. Then, a few few weeks ago, this Sid El-Halk discovered by accident that the sister of Mamun lived with her old mother in a little house in El Arache. Therefore he naturally resolved to seize the girl for the basha and thus regain his lost prestige by satisfying both the basha's desire and revenge. Fortunately, we discovered that he knew of Azalaya's hiding-place, and so Azalaya dispatched a message to her brother, and she and her mother honored my poor house by seeking refuge there."

"Any house wherein refuge is found thereby becomes a palace," observed the *khalifa*.

"But it was of little service as a refuge," continued ibn-Khader. "Much less than a palace would have been." His old face cracked into a crooked smile. "Because very soon came a night when we were descended upon by men who seized us all and bound and gagged us, and imprisoned us in a house belonging to Sid El-Halk. But Allah was gracious to us, and Mamun, having received Azalaya's message, came swiftly to our rescue.

"I do not know all there is to be known of the matter, but this I do know; that Mamun himself stole the daughter of the miserable El-Halk, and substituted her for Azalaya—so that it is manifest that El-Halk carried his own daughter to the basha—while Azalaya and her mother and I were making all speed away from the city. *Allah kerim!* I should not like to have been El-Halk—for his girl is very ugly—and had twice been declined by the basha before this!"

"*Al Latif!*" cried the *khalifa*. "The Subtle One! That is like Mamun. El-Halk's own daughter! Ridicule and revenge—and further insult to the basha! *Allah!* None but Mamun could have done such a thing!"

"As none but Mamun may pay the price," offered ibn-Khader slowly. "He should have arrived here days ago—for we have been a week, nearly, on the way, having to travel at night, and slowly, and some days not at all. I fear—" He spread his hands wide upon his knees, then clinched them.

"And I, also," growled Mohamed Ali. "Why came he not with you—after having exchanged one girl for the other?"

"I was told, *sidi*, that El-Halk—who himself came for the girl, together with a slave—commanded Mamun, who was acting the part of one of El-Halk's hirelings—they all lay helpless behind the house—to accompany him to the basha's palace."

"*Ai! ai!* To the palace!" cried the *khalifa*. "That is indeed bad."

"And I think," continued ibn-Khader, "that he was unable to escape doing so; otherwise he would have joined us—or overtaken us. It is certain that he is a prisoner—if he be not dead."

"Now Allah hear me," said Mohamed Ali; and there was a choke in his voice, for he loved his Third Scribe. "As He is my witness, if Mamun is prisoner he shall be freed, and if he is dead, those who killed him will wish that their mothers had never been born."

The heads of the *khalifa* and the Captain of the Guards nodded wordless agreement—a silent verdict of death—if Mamun were no more.

X

THE town of El Arache lies on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, some forty-five miles, as the crow flies, south of Cape Spartel, the extreme northwestern point of the African continent. All the civilized world knows El Arache, although not by that title. El Arache is the name given to it within the last few thousand years; but its original, and therefore true, name is The Garden of Hesperides, in which Hercules sought the golden apples, and found "a foaming-mouthed dragon."

A part of the town of El Arache is very, very new, and part of it is very, very old. That part which blazes with the newness of its masonry is the citadel with its round-topped towers — looking like inverted saucers—which was built, or rebuilt, by the Portuguese a few centuries ago. The old part is the massive wall which confines the town in its hollow square, vast walls of cut stone, gray-faced through the action of unnumbered years, walls thick enough and high enough to be filled with many remembered and more forgotten secret chambers and passages; broad enough and strong enough to uphold stone dwelling-places. And of these dwelling-places the most important is that known as the Sultan's House.

This house, the walls of which are an extention upward of the city wall itself, is so named because El Arache, like every other Moroccan town and city has a residence nominally set aside for the sole use of the sultan in case he should take into his royal head to pay a visit. Ordinarily a Sultan's House is unoccupied save upon the occasion of the visit of some important official either native or foreign. And there are many Sultan's Houses in Morocco which have never been occupied by the Commander of the Faithful.

In this house upon the eastern city wall of El Arache, raised perhaps forty feet above ground, is a single window-opening, barred by inch-thick iron. From this window one may look across many miles of flat green plain—a plain broken by a serpent-like ribbon of silver. This is the Kus River—the "foaming-mouthed dragon." The name seems inappropriate when one sees the river from the window of the Sultan's House, for the slope is so gentle, the fall so little, that the river seems more like motionless metal than like moving water—almost like a silver inlaid serpent on the green background of a Japanese vase. But when the slow-moving river reaches the slow-moving sea, a change takes place, and over the sand-bar which opposing river and sea have thrown up, wages eternal warfare.

And while Mohamed Ali and his friends made plans in the safety of the Atlas foot-hills, a young man with scant black beard and blacker eyes, wrapped in his *sulham*, sat in the broad window-sill of the Sultan's House and watched as he had watched for many days, little parties of men and beasts fording the silver Kus to the accompaniment of urgings, pleadings and cursings, which came to his ears as a far-distant murmur. Mamun, Third Scribe to Mohamed Ali, occupied the Sultan's House in El Arache—but he was not an honored guest—a fact which he faced ruefully, but with a grain of humor, as he sat in the deep-barred window and observed those who forded the river.

This was almost his only amusement, if it can be given the name; this, and the record which he kept, with a stub of lead-pencil, on the white-coated side wall of the window, of all those who crossed—men, women, children; horses, mules, asses, camels, even dogs. It was a sorry occupation, perhaps, for such a one as the Third Scribe, but Allah knows that other men in other prisons have diverted their thoughts, aided the flight of time, maintained their reason, with poorer makeshifts.

There was always the interest of guessing whether the number of the current day's travelers would exceed that of the preceding day's; whether from sunrise to sunset more people would cross from north to south than from south to north; whether the next arrivals would be men, or women; or horses or asses; and from which direction would they come. In fact, the Third Scribe had invented a little game with respect to these matters, and a space of the wall near the window was arabesqued with memoranda of the results of the mental bets made by Mamun with Mamun. Thus far one of him—the one who invented the game, of course, and not his imaginary double—was ahead some hundreds of *reales*.

But although the Third Scribe might thus be winner from himself of a new *djellaba* or *shakarah*, he reflected with unavoidable pessimism that he probably would not be in a position to make use of either. Dead men have no need either for pleasant garments nor embroidered leather shoulder-bags in which to carry money and cigarets and such things.

And the Third Scribe, while he smiled, and counted noses, and recorded and bet against himself, did not for a moment fail to realize that nothing stood between him and Paradise but the mantle of Allah.

That—and the extreme improbability of Mohamed Ali and his friends being able to rescue him. Of the two—and without belittling in the least the powers of his friends—the Third Scribe was inclined to trust much more to the Compassion of Allah than to any earthly power.

True Believer he was, but not the sort who, with impudent egotism, believes that Allah devotes His entire attention to a single individual. Neither was he one of those who believe in pestering the Almighty with prayers and pleadings and lamentations. "If the world is not entirely different from what I have observed it to be—" This to Mohamed Ali, upon a certain occasion—"then indeed Allah has sufficient trouble with those of little brains, so that we who have some sense should be as considerate as possible toward Him. If all prayers reach His ears surely He must be glad of silence from a few of His children." To which Mohamed Ali had growled an agreement: "By the name of the Prophet, yes! And I have observed that those who spend much time in prayer are apt to spend little in good works."

Wherefore, although he faced death, the Third Scribe made his five silent prayers each day, as is taught by Al Koran, and thereafter left his God in peace—except, perhaps, for a little, unworded prayer in his heart that the mantle of His protection might be permitted to remain about him.

XI

IT WAS market-day in El Arache. Since dawn—and before, for those country people who lived many miles from the city—every road and trail which led to the *sôk* had been dotted with moving figures—unburdened men afoot or upon donkeys, or, now and then, mule or horse, followed by wives and sons and daughters bearing the commodities to be offered for sale or exchange in the market-place; women singly or in clattering, bent-backed groups, going unaccompanied by their lords and masters—who preferred to sit at home and smoke and talk and rest, rather than endure the fatigue of the trail and the bustle of the *sôk*—to sell the products of their hands and to carry back to their men the coins garnered by their salesmanship. All converging, by the hundreds, from a hundred and eighty degrees of the compass, upon the eastern gate of the city, as innumerable small streams merge into a river. And as a river narrows to rush between confining walls, so this stream of humanity and humanity's burden-bearers narrowed to pass the great eastern gate, cut through twenty feet of stone.

Confusion of man and beast—with three or four yellow-trousered, red-jacketed, fez-topped soldiers of the city guard acting as keepers of the peace, well to the sides of the noisy torrent.

"*Ai! ai! ai!* Brother to a camel! Can you not go ahead? Are your feet grown to the ground? Must you impede the progress of a poor vendor of charcoal?"

The carbon-smeared rider upon the donkey leaned forward and poked with a stick at the broad, sweating back of a bronzed countryman who—remarkably—carried in each hand half a dozen clay-jugs, hanging from cords, which he endeavored to protect from the surging mass about him.

"On with you! On with you, I say," continued the jeering voice of the charcoal-seller. "The market-day will be over before we arrive. On with you!"

The countryman turned a snarling face over his shoulder.

"All the world must make way for *you*, I suppose!" he shrilled. "As for a *khalifa! Khalifa* of the Charcoal Kilns. *Allah kerim!*" He turned fiercely upon the driver of a donkey which had crashed against the jugs, causing them to smite his shins, and thus was oblivious to the broad grin which spread the face of the charcoal-seller. "*Allah kerim!* Never again do I come to the *sôk*. Nor would I have done so this time had my wife Fatmah not been in child-bed."

A dozen voices raised themselves in laughter; the naïveté of the Moroccan countryman is humor for the gods.

"Have a care for the jugs, O Sidi Father of Twenty," jibed the charcoal-seller, as he urged his donkey past the vociferous obstacle. "Lest your wife Fatmah beat you upon your return."

"Beat me! Beat me! Do you think I fear her? I carry the jugs here only because——"

His voice was lost to the charcoal-vendor as he passed on through the gateway and into the city street. A little while later his donkey was picketed in the big *sôk*, his bags of charcoal were displayed upon the ground, and he sat between them chanting in strident voice the merits of his goods. But though inquirers came, desiring to buy charcoal, all went away again, calling to the attention of Allah that the charcoal-seller was insane and thus desired three prices for his carbon—besides which he stolidly refused to haggle or reduce his price, thus evidencing beyond question an unbalanced mind.

Wherefore at the end of the morning, the two bags of charcoal were still intact, but this seemed in no wise to disturb the owner, who squatted contentedly between them, struck up an acquaintance with a vegetable-seller on one side of him and a potter on the other—and watched the helter-skelter of people in the *sôk*.

About midday there came a diversion from the routine of buying and selling. Came in sight of the charcoal-vendor a figure in patchwork, ancient *djellaba*, wearing a green turban upon his matted hair, and carrying a great bamboo-staff.

"*Schuf, h'naya*," said the charcoal-seller to his neighbor. "*Schoon ja?* Who comes? A holy man, by his appearance, and a *hadji*—but one whom I do not know."

"Nor I," answered the potter.

"*I* think I have seen him before," offered the vegetable-merchant, who cultivated the habit of seeming to have knowledge which he did not possess. "I think I saw him once in the *sôk* of El K'sar."

At which the charcoal-seller smiled a little.

Surrounded by a little following of the curious, as all holy men are, he of the green turban made his way slowly through the market-place, gazing to right and left, not as though seeking some one, but as if the place and people were strange to him. And now and then making brief and orthodox reply to those who mustered up courage to question him or to ask his blessing. Thus he approached slowly and somewhat majestically the place where the charcoal-seller squatted between his bags of carbon, who watched with half-shut eyes in which shone admiration, and with a face from which all trace of amusement could not be washed away.

The holy man came opposite the charcoal-seller, and with a glance at him thrust his bamboo-staff ahead of him as though about to pass on.

"Your blessing, O holy one," cried the charcoal man.

The *marabout* stopped and turned his face slowly toward him who thus solicited his grace.

"The blessing of Allah upon you, my son," he said in deep, resonant voice, deliberately, raising a hand in benediction.

The charcoal-seller gazed into the eyes of the *marabout*.

"Is there no especial blessing for the burner of charcoal, O holy one?" he asked.

"Once he who began life in your lowly occupation," replied the *marabout*, "—or at least I have heard it said—eventually rose to become Commander of the Faithful and to live in the Sultan's House. Those of the True Faith who are lowly in the eyes of the world are notable in the eyes of Allah, the Compassionate and Merciful. His benediction be upon you."

He passed along, shuffling in ancient slippers, his iron-shod staff striking a spark from the cobble-stones.

"To live in the Sultan's house," murmured the charcoal-seller to the potter, who had been listening with open ears.

"There is a Sultan's House *here*, in El Arache, at the northeastern corner of the wall," observed the potter. "Did the holy one perchance refer to it?"

He of the charcoal-bags laughed gently.

"I think not," he made answer. "And yet—perhaps; perhaps."

And to himself:

"So the holy one already has heard rumors, if not facts. The Sultan's House!"

He yawned, stretched his arms.

"Allah! This grows tiresome," he observed to the potter. "I foresee I shall have to reduce the price of my carbon—if I am to eat today. And I grow hungry."

Again he set up his cry—and the price he named was so reasonable that in ten minutes his bags were empty. Whereupon he threw the empty sacks upon the donkey's back, mounted the beast, and with kicks and guttural "*urrr's*" rode from the market-place and out into the open country. There he turned toward the north, following the city wall.

"Let us have sight," he said to the donkey, "of the house which sits upon the northeastern corner of the city wall."

XII

THE man in the Sultan's house sat in the deep recess of the solitary window and added to his tallies of passers of the ford. It had been a busy morning and one side of the window-opening was almost covered by marks.

But the watcher had found little of interest in his occupation; the travelers were too much of a type to merit individual attention—country people as much alike as beans in a jar—and their actions had been as uniform as their natures.

Only thrice during the entire morning had the watcher's eye been fixed for more than a swift, enumerating moment upon any of the figures. Once a charcoal-seller, riding a stubborn donkey, had had to dismount from his beast and drag it, by main force, across the river. A little later a man had stopped in mid-river to argue with his wife, and then to attempt to beat her; but he had lost his footing, much to the resulting amusement of others. And the third person who had attracted the attention of the man in the Sultan's House—who had caused him to squint in order to see better the distant figure—was a holy man, clad in ancient patchwork *djellaba*, with bushy hair surmounted by the green turban which marked him as a *marabout* and a *hadji*.

Upon the turban, and twined in hair and beard, were little coins and shells which—although Mamun could not hear them—tinkled as he strode along, aided by a giant bamboo-staff. Such of the face as showed below the matted hair and inside the unkempt, dirty beard, was dark-skinned—as dark, almost, as that of a Soudanese. A striking big figure of a holy man, accompanied by a little following of fellow-travelers, seeking blessings—or satisfaction of curiosity. Mamun watched him cross the ford and swing into the curved road that leads to the eastern gate.

"Another holy man!" he commented to himself. "Assuredly Morocco has as many holy men as a village dog has fleas. And like fleas, they are parasites, fattening upon the blood of others. Ah, well—some day when I am old and my blood runs but slowly in my veins, perhaps I too shall don a green turban, and carry a staff, and tell others how to acquire the virtue which I myself had never been able to acquire. If—that is—I should live until that time." Which thought brought him forgetfulness of the holy man who had crossed the ford, and set up a line of less amusing reflections.

The sun moved away from the window; a guard opened the little shutter in the prison door, and Mamun took from his hands a bowl of *kesk'soo*, a piece of bread like half a big pancake, and a jug of water. With these he returned to the window-ledge.

Now came unexpectedly into view of the Third Scribe a donkey bearing a rider whose smudged gray *djellaba* proclaimed him at sight as a charcoal-vendor. As he rode along, at a little distance from the walls, he seemed to be studying them.

"*Humph!* He of the stubborn donkey!" observed Mamun, and watched him idly—until the rider dragged the beast about and drew closer to the wall. Then, as he threw back his head, to observe the window, which was a good fifty feet above him, the Third Scribe stiffened.

"*Ya Latif!*" he exclaimed. "*Allah kerim!* That one I know!"

Leaning against the bars he gave a peculiar whistle, at which a smile crinkled the face of the charcoal-seller. He slid from his donkey and approached the wall. There he took from his *shakarah* a ball of twine such as charcoal-burners use to tie up bags, and tossed it at the window. His aim was true; the ball passed the bars and fell into Mamun's hands. Thereupon the charcoal-seller drew from beneath his cloak an automatic pistol and pointed to it. The man above understood. Holding to the end of the cord, he dropped the ball out of the window—and very shortly thereafter held in his hands a weapon for use against his enemies. Little opportunity to use it there might be—but at least he was armed. He thrust the weapon into his belt, beneath the *djellaba* and concealed by it.

Came the sound of footsteps outside the door.

Mamun made a swift motion to the seller of charcoal, who speedily mounted his donkey and rode away, singing a little song.

The door opened and Mamun turned to find the basha standing in the doorway.

Mamun looked coldly, with narrowed eyes, at the fat face.

"I was much troubled by vermin last evening," he observed, after a little while. "And I see that I am to be troubled again today."

A red scowl disfigured the face of the basha.

"You will be molested little longer in *this* world," he growled. "It is my pleasure to tell you that tomorrow you shall have five hundred lashes at the post; and—if you still live—you shall be buried alive in the mortar of the foundation of my new house. Rest well!"

He slammed the door behind him, and Mamun heard the bolts thrust home.

"*Y'Allah!*" commented the Third Scribe to the doorway which had framed the basha's figure. "He has been reading of the tortures invented by Mulai Ismail the Great! Education is an evil thing."

But his face grew serious quickly: Few men survive five hundred lashes of the leather thongs—and no man survives burial in mortar.

XIII

THE charcoal-vendor urged his donkey through the city gates and proceeded up the main street until he reached the mosque, where he turned down a little cañon-like thoroughfare, coming shortly to an iron-studded green door set deep in an archway. There he dismounted and struck with the iron knocker upon the door. It was promptly opened and a negro servant bade him enter.

Entering a room which was pointed out to him he found a big brown man sitting upon the cushions, a green turban lying beside him, and a bamboo-staff resting against the wall.

"Sit, Aidomar," said the big man, patting the cushions. "What found you in the Sultan's House?"

The *khalifa* drew off the charcoal-smudged *djellaba* and tossed it from him. From his *shakarah* he took a piece of cloth which looked much like a white handkerchief, and sitting down beside Mohamed Ali, he spread it out. It was not a handkerchief, but a square of material whose texture proclaimed that it had been torn from a white under-*sulham*. There were markings upon it.

"Mamun is in the Sultan's House," said the *khalifa*. "Riding along the wall I saw him at the window. By means of a cord I gave him a pistol. Scarcely had this been done when he motioned a warning to me and I rode on. Returning by the same route later, this cloth, in a little ball, was tossed from the window as I passed—but I did not see the face of Mamun. I have read the message—but it is not complete, I think."

Mohamed Ali, with scowling eyes, was also reading the message.

> Tomorrow I am to be beaten, *in sha'allah*, after which, unless——

"*In sha'allah,*" Mohamed Ali rumbled, "if Allah wills. *I* think Allah will desire something different. But—'unless'? I wonder——"

"Manifestly he was interrupted," offered the *khalifa*. "Who can guess what he desired to say?"

"I think," said Mohamed Ali, "that he would have said, 'unless I receive aid from my friends'—having recognized you."

"That is possible," agreed the *khalifa*. "But it is also possible that he would not waste valuable time writing unnecessary words. Something else is to happen tomorrow. What it is, we do not know. But we do know that no time must be lost. Tomorrow! *Hm!* Tomorrow holds many things, and not all of them good."

"*Allah kerim!*" shouted Mohamed Ali. "Think you that we shall permit this thing? Are our brains then dead that we can not outwit the basha? Is Mamun to die because his friends are no longer of value? The Captain of the Guards and twenty men with guns await our orders in a hiding-place near by. I myself will lead those men into the very *harem* of the basha if it is necessary."

He rose and strode nervously about the room.

"But," objected the *khalifa*, "to my mind there is not the slightest doubt that any open attempt at rescue will be the signal for one of Mamun's guards to stick a *kumiah* into his throat. Obviously a basha who deliberates in order to select the most satisfying form of punishment, takes no chances on losing his vengeance. Moreover—I learned other matters. After reading this message I returned to the *sôk*, invested a few *reales* in a bag of charcoal, and carried it for sale to the Sultan's House."

Mohamed Ali's eyes questioned, but he said no word.

"Or, rather, I stopped first just opposite the Sultan's House. There is a small force of the basha's guards garrisoned there."

With raised eyebrows he looked at his chief.

"*Hmph!* growled Mohamed Ali. "I understand. With respect to my twenty men. However——"

"Assuredly," interrupted the *khalifa*. "Assuredly you could lead—*we* could lead—*our* twenty men there, and no doubt overcome the twenty or more city guards, but how would that release Mamun? Because, after I had failed to sell my carbon to the garrison—yes, my price *was* great—I crossed to the other side of the street, and offered it at the Sultan's House. This—" he drew up the sleeve of his shirt—"is the result."

Two red welts crossed his arm.

"They beat me off. Five of them. With sticks. And one was for taking me to the *casbah* for having entered the courtyard. However, the beating is nothing—except that is shows the temper of Mamun's guards. But what I was able to observe was of some value: The door to Mamun's prison is closed by two iron bars, each of which is locked by a great padlock—and I have no doubt that the basha himself has the keys. It would take an hour for a strong man, with an iron bar, to pry loose those bolts—if he could get the chance. And this, as I observe the matter—would demand first the overcoming of the garrison, next the overcoming of the guard—and next——"

"*Allah!* Cease!" cried Mohamed Ali. "Next would be to hold the whole city at bay while we broke open the door."

"Precisely," agreed the *khalifa*. "And even Mohamed Ali can not do that."

Followed a little silence. Then:

"About the window, from outside the wall?"

"It would need a hundred men to tear the iron grating from its masonry. The upright bars can not be bent, for they are set into two cross-bars. And—you know how we build our windows. A hundred men could not tear that one loose, nor could one man with an iron lever. It is as solid as the wall of the house itself—and that is three feet thick."

"*Hmph!* This basha is a thorough sort of person. Nevertheless—" his big hand smote his knee—"the window is passable by neither force nor wit. The door is not passable by force such as we have, and there are too many watchers to trick them all. Wherefore: our only road is to wait until the door is opened. Tomorrow Mamun will be brought forth; then neither windows nor doors will bar us from him. That, I think, is our only road."

"Our only road," agreed the *khalifa*.

"Good then," concluded Mohamed Ali. "Knowing what road we must take, let us observe how it runs."

XIV

THE spectacle of an unfortunate at the whipping-post was not an unusual one in Al-Moghreb al-Acksa, but never was such punishment administered publicly without its mass of spectators.

There is a fascination about it which exceeds that of all other modes of punishment or death. Perhaps it is because the human element of resistance differs so greatly in men. Some men crumple at the first swish of the leather thongs; others smile bravely, but flinch at the blows; others seem impervious to pain, and return curses for strokes with steady voices and much earnestness. Sometimes men die at the post—but not often enough to take pleasure away from the watchers. Sometimes five hundred lashes kills a great brute of a man—and sometimes the same number do no more than carve forever seared white bars upon a brown back, and an eternal grin upon a brown face. Most men who wear that grin are best left alone—because the post never cures; it only crystallizes.

But because the beatings are rarely intended to kill, and because the capacity of a human body—and a human will—to resist punishment, has always appealed and probably always will appeal in one form or another, to man's fellow man, every one is willing to put aside for the hour his work or his play, and to gather at vantage points about the post to see the sport.

The whipping-post at El Arache was at one side of the arch-bordered *sôk*, or market-place. That the plans of the basha with respect to the Third Scribe were known was made evident by the constantly increasing crowd and the comments which were thrown about. Nor had it been the basha's intention or desire to keep the affair a secret as long as possible: Half of the punishment for the Third Scribe would be the stares of the populace, the insult of the public chastisement. The basha was quite well aware of the fact that Mamun, a man of high birth, would prefer private death to a beating in the market-place—hence the beating.

This thought—and others—disturbed the mind of the Third Scribe as, surrounded by guards and with hands tied behind him, he was led from the Sultan's House to the market-place. He limped slightly, and blood was on his face—for Mamun's hands had not been tied without a struggle. All that long night he had kept awake, pacing the floor of his prison. He knew that his friends would attempt his rescue, and, even though he realized completely the futility of any endeavor to throw open the door of the Sultan's House for his escape, he felt that any moment might bring a message or a summons to the window.

But the night passed without incident, and with dawn the realization came to the Third Scribe that even Mohamed Ali and his other friends could not accomplish the impossible. For seven days and seven nights he himself had vainly tried to plan escape—but the bars of the window were as solid as the bars of Fate, and the door was as strong as the walls themselves, and five guards waited. Wherefore with the coming of dawn Mamun knew that for once a prison had been found strong enough to hold one of Mohamed Ali's men. But he also knew that somewhere in El Arache keen minds were planning and strong hearts resolving that he should not fall victim to the basha's hatred. He examined again the mechanism of the automatic which the *khalifa* had sent up to him at the end of a string—and concealed it again in his garments with a smile and a shrug. Of little use to him so long as he was inside the Sultan's House. One guard he might kill—but four others waited outside a door he could not pass.

At last there came to him the clatter of a horse's hoofs upon the cobbles, the sound of iron touching iron and the grate of bolts in sockets. The door was suddenly thrown wide, disclosing his guards standing massed in the doorway, with rifles in hand. One stepped forward, carrying a piece of rope; the others covered Mamun with their guns. The Third Scribe smiled grimly—and turned his back upon his jailers.

"Your wrists," growled the man with the rope.

"Here!" responded the Third Scribe and whirled, automatic in hand.

For a breath the fellow stared, slack-jawed, at the pistol. Then, with a movement too quick for eye to follow, he slashed Mamun across the face with the rope he carried. Even as he moved, Mamun fired, and then, half-blinded by the blow, sprang across the fallen body and shot twice into the guards at the door before he reached them. Rifles spoke vainly in excitement. Mamun thrust the muzzle of one aside, pistoled the man behind it—then sudden blackness whirled about him.

"Now we shall tie his hands," phlegmatically observed the guard who had tried to break Mamun's head with his rifle, as he picked the rope from the hands of his prostrate fellow guard.

"Dead," he observed, of the latter. "Well—better he than I." And he proceeded to tie the hands of the Third Scribe.

"Now," he ordered, when this business was finished, "bring water. The basha said this man should not die—yet."

Water was brought, and dashed on Mamun's face and poured down his throat. Spluttering, choking, he revived. He tried to raise his hands to an aching head and grinned feebly at the rope about his wrists. Slowly he rose to his feet.

"Let us go," he said. "I am wearied of this place."

XV

SWIFTLY word passed down the street that the man to be punished was on his way to the *sôk*. Swiftly the crowd gathered, buzzing like a hive of bees. Not the steady deep drone of an angry mob, in which every voice is pitched at the fighting tone, but the variegated, varying hum of every-day humanity talking of many things. And upon the heels of the news trod Mamun and his guards, preceded and followed by a rabble which in curiosity approached the prisoner but dexterously avoided a too great proximity to his captors and the path of the dozen city guards who had followed from the barracks near the Sultan's House.

The market-place itself was filled with people—black and white and brown; men, women and children, even babes in arms. Business came to an abrupt standstill, and all sought for vantage points from which to view the proceedings. The roof of the long-arched arcade was lined with sitting and standing figures.

About the whipping-post itself the crowd was most compact, each spectator fighting determinedly to hold his place. Blows from Mamun's escort broke a way through and the city guards cleared a space about the post, where a big negro, leather whip in hand, already waited. As Mamun's cloak and shirt were torn from his shoulders, and his hands lashed to a ring in the post, there came a cry:

"The basha! The basha comes!"

His Excellency rode slowly through the crowd, mounted upon a great white horse, with silken and silver trappings, followed by another mounted man, and preceded by two soldiers bearing iron-tipped staffs. Scornfully the basha overlooked the crowd which parted before him, but when his eyes fell upon the figure of Mamun a glow filled them and a smile grew upon his face.

At the edge of the open space he reined his horse to a halt. At his side he saw a tall holy man, wearing a green turban—a holy man who had followed close in his trail through the crowd, though this he did not know. Next to the holy man was a huge figure wrapped in a brown *djellaba*, whose keen black eyes flashed, as he looked around the circle of humanity about the post. Twenty other brown *djellabas* were there.

The basha raised his hand.

"Let him be beaten," he cried.

The black raised his whip slowly at arm's length—up and backwards.

The right arm of the big fellow beside the holy man moved swiftly; the crack of a pistol cut the air, and the black, with a howl of anguish and surprize, dropped the whip and gripped a broken right arm.

Nothing so stampedes a crowd as the unexpected, nor renders it so utterly helpless. Many unexpected things now began to happen simultaneously under the startled disbelieving eyes of the basha—although he had but little time to observe them.

He saw, as one in a dream, a score of men in brown *djellabas* break from the crowd, with rifles in their hands, and surround the whipping-post and the man it held fast. He saw the crowd turn to fly from the muzzles of those rifles. He turned in his saddle to call to soldiers behind him, when he saw another amazing thing. The holy man threw down his bamboo-staff; he tore from his head the bulky green turban; he drew from beneath his robe a heavy automatic; he pulled from his saddle the man who rode with the basha, and leaped into it.

"Mohamed Ali!" he shouted.

Back from twenty lusty throats echoed the signal—and upon the crowd fell choking terror and a very great desire to be elsewhere.

The basha looked into the muzzle of Mohamed Ali's gun, and his face was green with fear. In panic he dug spurs into his horse's belly. The beast leaped forward—there was no other way to go—Mohamed Ali was behind, cutting off retreat to the basha's *casbah*. Across the *sôk* Mohamed Ali drove the basha. Behind, twenty hillmen, the big black-whiskered captain in command, held with their rifles the city guard. Mamun, aided by the *khalifa*, followed in the path of Mohamed Ali and the basha to the city gate, closed and deserted now by its guardians. Two horses tethered there they seized.

Now the basha was becoming too frightened to be afraid. As he had looked upon the holy man and recognized in him Mohamed Ali, his guts had turned to water, and, for a little, the world whirled about him. But as Mohamed Ali had driven him across the market-place, taunting him, his fear—for he knew he faced death—brought to him the courage of the terror-stricken, if it be courage. At the gate he swiftly reined in his horse, caused it to rear and turn, and dashed straight at the pistol-muzzle, drawing his own gun as he did so. Mohamed Ali laughed, and with a deft hand, drew his horse into position to meet the rush. The two beasts crashed, shoulder to shoulder. A bullet from the basha's gun sung past Mohamed Ali's ear. His own automatic barked, and the basha's pistol flew from his hand as a bird flies.

"Back!" ordered Mohamed Ali. "Back to the gate!" And again he laughed.

Scarcely had this little by-play occurred when the captain and his twenty men came up. After them came half a hundred perhaps of the city guard, firing wild, but not caring to draw too near to those whom they pursued. The captain slid the bars of the great door, swung it open, and the *khalifa* and Mamun were about to pass through when, from behind a pillar beside the gate a small white figure ran and seized the stirrup of the Third Scribe. The face of a girl looked up into his.

"Take me with you," she cried. "Take me with you or he—" she looked with eyes of horror at the basha—"will kill me as he killed my father."

"The daughter of Sid El-Halk!" exclaimed Mamun.

"Yes—yes," cried the girl. "You—you saw him kill my father. And now—oh, I am afraid—afraid!"

"Come, then," said Mamun, looking at Mohamed Ali, who nodded. "Although I do not think that *he* will kill many more. But I made use of you—through necessity. Now I can repay, perhaps."

He drew the girl to the saddle in front of him, and they rode through the gateway. After them followed the *khalifa*, a fear-smitten basha, Mohamed Ali and the captain and his men.

"Go now, to the cavern where our horses are," said the captain. "I will hold the gate until you send a mount for me."

He drew the great gate shut, opened the little door within it—only big enough for the passage of one person at a time—and, rifle in hand, took position there—a position from which a hundred men could not easily dislodge him.

XVI

AT THE cavern, where their horses awaited them, Mohamed Ali gave orders. Willing hands pulled the fat basha from his saddle; willing hands relieved him of his *sulham;* willing hands bound his wrists with a stout rope and tied that rope to a tree. Then into the hand of the Third Scribe Mohamed Ali thrust a stout riding-crop of leather, and smiled as he did so.

"A whipping was to take place today," he said. "I see no reason to change the arrangement."

The eyes of the Third Scribe answered him.

Now the basha was no longer strengthened by fear, and pictures of strong men crumbling before the lash came into his mind's eye most inconveniently. He cried out before the leather touched his skin—and this is the proof of spiritual cowardice. Thereafter came other cries, but only for a moment. After the third lash Mamun flung the whip from him in disgust.

"I could never beat a dog," he growled. "And this basha is more dog than most. Let us go."

Mohamed Ali grinned broadly—and laid a detaining hand upon the *khalifa,* who had picked up the whip with the evident desire of completing what the Third Scribe had begun.

"Enough, then," said Mohamed Ali. "Let us go."

He fired his pistol as a signal to the captain, and they mounted their horses and set off. From the city gate a little cloud of dust rose and raced toward them.

But they had gone but a little ways when the daughter of Sid El-Halk, riding now upon a horse by herself, swung her mount around and raced back to the tree where the basha still groaned. Mohamed Ali, seeing, guessed her purpose and raced after her. But swiftly as he rode, the girl outsped him. He saw her slide from saddle, saw her arm rise. A knife flashed, and he reached for it as he dashed up. But his clutching hand missed, and the brown arm of Sid El-Halk's daughter drove the blade into the neck of the basha of El Arache.

"That," she cried, turning to Mohamed Ali, "is for my father."

"Another thing that will be charged to the account of Mohamed Ali," observed he, shrugging his shoulders.

He cut the rope that held the basha to the tree, and gazed for a moment at the fallen figure.

"Now—let us ride," he said, and helped the girl into her saddle.

The call of the *mueddin* echoed over El Arache as they went swiftly toward the hills.

SOME AFTERNOON CALLS

by Thomson Burtis

Author of "Human Contraband," "Don't Swat a Flyer," etc.

MACDOWELL was exactly two miles above the earth when theMcMullen air-drome came in sight. The near-by town, which was four milse from the field, seemed to be only a stone's throw from the diminutive brown square of sand. The huge corrugated-iron hangars flanking the air-drome to east and west were merely black specks against the ground. The Rio Grande, six miles southward, was partially obscured by the left wing of his big DeHaviland

He did not start his dive for the field immediately, but allowed the plane to drive along level and maintain its altitude while he idly surveyed the terrane below. The world was bathed in clear golden light, and even tiny crawling things like automobiles stood out in vivid detail. A dozen other flyers, at almost the same moment, were thundering along toward their home air-dromes all the way from McMullen to the Gulf of California, and in another half-hour the day's work of the Border Patrol would be completed. That is, unless an emergency arose. One never can tell on the Border.

The big bomber was fairly over the field before MacDowell cut the motor to a thousand revolutions a minute, closed the motor shutters and started down. Every once in so often the Texan felt inclined toward an aerial debauch, and this was one of the times. He nosed down steeply, and held the ship in a dive until its speed was a hundred and sixty miles an hour and the flimsy craft was trembling in every strut and spar. He pulled up smoothly, using right rudder with the stick, and the ship raced upward and to the right in a climbing turn.

At the top of the chandelle, when the ship was cocked up steeply, he changed to full left rudder and cut the motor a bit more. The D. H. shot earthward, still tipped up on one wing, in a tremendous side-slip. The terrific air-blast tore the breath from the air-men's nostrils, and big George Hickman, in the back seat, was compelled to hold his goggles with one hand to keep them from blowing around.

Smoothly applied left rudder and the neutralized stick guided the ship out of the side-slip and into another dive. The throttle came back a bit more, and then MacDowell pulled back suddenly on the stick and thrust left rudder all the way on. The DeHaviland turned three-quarters of the way on its back, and the fliers hung on their safety belts as the great plane hovered lazily in the sky. Then it swooped downward and level again in a terrific rush, only to sweep smoothly upward, hang on one wing and side-slip downward again.

For five minutes the De Haviland swooped, fluttered, twisted and turned downward in evolutions that were graceful and smooth as those of no other being's or thing's can possibly be. The ship flowed easily from one maneuver to another, with never a sudden jerk nor hesitating stall. Two thousand feet from the ground the motor stopped making any noise whatever, save for sudden raucous barks as MacDowell jazzed it to keep the spark-plugs clean. He turned northward, swept around in a steep spiral until he was pointed south for the field, side-slipped over the low fence that was the northern boundary of the airdrome, straightened out into a terrific skid to kill his speed and landed lightly on three points.

While the ship was still rolling across the hard-packed sand he swung it toward the eastern row of hangars, where some mechanics who had been working on a ship were ready to receive it. They seized the wings and guided it up to the line. MacDowell shut off the gas flow, pulled the spark all the way back and waited for the motor to run itself out. Then he snapped off the switches and clambered out to join George Hickman in a cigaret.

"Here comes Jimmy," he remarked, his eyes on a speck against the sky. It was the patrol ship from the west. "If we hadn't been on patrol I'd have landed on the beach for a swim in the Gulf. Looked tempting, didn't it?"

The perspiring Hickman assented soulfully, and then said—

"Here comes the famous flivver with Sheriff Bill at the helm."

A battered Ford was entering the airdrome, and the two fliers lounged across the field toward a row of buildings which bounded the southern edge. A dull boom shivered the quietude.

"The bunch are still at bombing practise," commented Hickman unnecessarily.

The car clattered down the road which separated the buildings from the landing-field and drew to a stop in front of the small headquarters shack. A two-hundred-and-fifty-pound form clambered out of the vehicle and bellowed a greeting. Mr. William Trowbridge, Sheriff of Hidalgo County, formerly an ornament to the professions of cowpuncher and Ranger, and amateur air-man of parts, was paying his almost daily call.

"Business bein' slack, I figured I might be able tuh bamboozle a ride to cool me off," he explained, pushing his huge sombrero farther back on his head. Both air-men were well over six feet tall, but the sheriff topped them even without the aid of his prodigious chapeau.

"I'll take you up when they get my ship gassed," MacDowell promised.

"I seen you raisin' —— when I come out, and stopped, along with others, to watch," stated Trowbridge, rolling a tiny brown cigaret expertly. "Give me some o' the same, will yuh?"

An orderly appeared at the door of headquarters and shouted above the drone of the incoming DeHaviland—

"Sheriff Trowbridge wanted on the phone—long distance!"

"Told the boys I'd be here," explained Trowbridge, and lumbered into the office.

Hickman and MacDowell followed for the purpose of turning in their reports.

The sheriff's embossed cowboy boots clumped across the floor noisily, and he shouted into the mouthpiece in stentorian tones:

"Yeah, this is Trowbridge. Huh? Oh, hello, Charley. Yeah, I come out here fur a ride. Huh? Yuh don't say!"

"Pop" Cravath, rotund and bald-headed adjutant, put up a warning hand as Hickman started for the water-cooler. The observer stopped, and along with MacDowell and Cravath listened closely. The sheriff seemed to be crouched in his chair, as if about to spring at the telephone, and puckered gray eyes were mere slits of light in the weather-beaten face. He stroked his luxuriant gray mustache slowly as he listened.

"'Twin' Connelly, yuh say? Hum. Where are they?"

A few indistinguishable words flowed over the phone. Then, as plainly as if the gun had been fired in the room, there came the crack of a shot.

A vague buzzing over the telephone, and then silence.

"Hello, Charley!" bellowed the sheriff, pounding the receiver up and down.

The roar of the motor without died away to nothing, and dead silence hung like a pall over the little office. The boom of another bomb made Cravath jump.

Trowbridge slammed down the receiver and got to his feet.

"——'s poppin' in Carana shore 'nough," he said briskly. "Tex, how about flyin' me down for a look-see?"

"All right with me. How about it, Cravath?"

Until Captain Kennard returned from bombing, the adjutant was C. O.

"Of course. What is it, sheriff?"

"Orderly!" shouted MacDowell, before Trowbridge could answer.

A soldier appeared in the doorway to the outer office.

"Tell Sergeant Cary on the line to get my ship gassed and oiled *pronto*—I'm leaving right away."

He glanced at the sheriff. The big pearl-handled guns which were always a part of his costume when on business bent were not to be seen.

"You'll have to use a Colt, won't you, sheriff?" he enquired. "You can take George's, and also his helmet and goggles."

The sheriff nodded.

"All right—beat it!" commanded Tex, and the orderly vanished. "What's up, sheriff?"

"That was Charley Van," explained Trowbridge, walking up and down with great strides. "Remember that time me and Cap'n Kennard bumped into that scheme o' smugglin' wops intuh this country through Carana? I stuck Charley down there for a while because I had my suspicions that it was a right good town fur things tuh happen. There's only one white family there—Dalton, the storekeeper. Charley's supposed tuh be his clerk. He was just callin' tuh tell me somethin' was up. Twin Connelly, that was mixed up in that killin' in Marfa a while back, is in Carana, and Charley seen him and follered him a little, accordin' to what I could get, and he was jest tellin' me what he thought he knowed when he was shot. There was a chance Charley was wrong up to then, but there ain't no doubt now. I'll fool 'em by gettin' there in a half-hour when whoever done it don't figure nothin' can happen under four hours! Gimme yore gun, will yuh, George? Got some extra clips? Fine."

The holster belt did not come within six inches of meeting around the sheriff's waist, so he thrust the automatic into his trousers and the extra clips into his pocket. MacDowell lounged against the wall in loose relaxation, but below the disarrayed tawny hair his eyes were glowing warmly.

"If the man that shot your deputy overheard the conversation he knows where you are, and in view of the fact that you and Cap Kennard raised —— with a ship and machine guns right there the unknown might figure the lay," he commented.

"So he might, but he can't get nowhere except intuh Mexico before we see what's up. His game's crabbed, thataway, and mebbe he won't give up that easy," grunted Trowbridge. "Ready?"

They went out, followed by Cravath and the envious Hickman. The other patrol ship was on the line, alongside MacDowell's. The mechanics removed the funnel from the gas-tank as the passengers walked swiftly across the field.

JENNINGS and Ransom reported no signs of anything unusual at Carana. The sheriff outlined the case briefly to them as MacDowell warmed up the motor. It was still warm from his recent flight, and two minutes were sufficient to send the thermometer up to seventy, Centigrade. For a few seconds he held the throttle wide open and watched his instruments. Oil-pressure, air-pressure, temperature, rotations per minute, the meter reading—all were satisfactory.

The twelve-cylinder Liberty roared along smoothly on either switch, and bellowed its song of power without skip or miss. Tex looked around, to find the sheriff standing up in the rear cockpit, helmet and goggles adjusted and the free-swinging observer's belt strapped around his huge frame. His unbuttoned vest was flapping in the propeller blast.

The mechanics pulled the blocks which had been holding the ship back, and it trundled swiftly up the field. Near the fence Tex swung it around and thrust the throttle to full advance. Nose to the ground the ship flashed across the sand. Fifty-five, sixty, sixty-five miles an hour, and then it answered the pull of the stick and swept into the air.

It cleared the buildings easily, and MacDowell leveled out for a moment before banking westward. He wasted no time in circling the field, nor did he throttle down to the usual fifteen hundred revolutions a minute, but with the four hundred and fifty horse-power motor running wide open he sent it on a bee-line toward its goal.

He climbed gradually, but not steeply enough to retard their speed perceptibly, which was an even hundred and ten miles an hour. He opened the motor shutters wide to keep the motor from boiling, and then hunched down comfortably behind the windshield to avoid the terrific air-stream compounded of their speed and the propeller wash.

The sheriff stood erect in the back cockpit, facing the rear and leaning against the air-stream. Patches of mesquite flowed away behind, and wondering laborers in the fields looked up in wonder at the low-flying ship hurling itself along above them.

Carana was sixty miles away and easily located because the river made a tremendous bend northward there, and the apex of the bend pointed straight for the little Mexican settlement. There was a field near-by that had been used for forced landings, so there would be no time wasted looking for a place to come down.

The ship was six hundred feet high when the rim of a big patch of chaparral passed beneath it. It extended for a mile ahead of them and then gave way to open fields again. MacDowell glanced at his instruments to make sure all was well. For the next minute there would be no possible landing-fields.

As if some sardonic power had arranged matters, the motor sputtered, half-way across the mesquite. MacDowell's head snapped up as if jerked by a string. In a split-second he had scanned the needles which told the tale of the motor and could find nothing wrong.

For a second or two he waited tensely. Another sputter, and momentarily the motor ceased firing. It caught again—in another ten seconds he could make one of the fields ahead, even if the motor did go bad. He seized the throttle, jerked it back and then all the way forward. A small plug in the feed-line or the jets could sometimes be obviated that way.

For a moment it seemed to work. Then sudden silence replaced the clattering roar of the Liberty. Automatically Tex nosed down and peered ahead. It was barely possible that the ship would glide over the mesquite and make a field.

Suddenly a terrific blast of heat swept back from the motor and a sinister blue flame played over it. The feed-line had broken, and gas was spraying over the hot motor.

He threw the ship in a bank and jammed on top-rudder while he turned off the gas petcocks. The De Haviland side-slipped downward, and the draft carried the heat and flame away from the pilot. It would be almost impossible to make the field now. The best they could hope for was to side-slip into the mesquite without the whole ship catching fire.

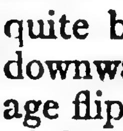
He straightened out of the slip after two hundred feet, but only for an instant. Again that terrific wave of heat hit him, and he was forced into another and steeper slip.

He held the ship grimly, one foot locked against the rudder and the air-blast seeming to flay his left cheek with its force. Perhaps fifty yards from the edge of the chaparral there was a tiny clearing, which would provide an easier crack-up than the mesquite. The altimeter read three hundred feet when he dared the flames once more.

The slip had blown out the fire, and the gas remaining in the line had been exhausted by this time. He brought the nose up as far as he dared, and in a shallow, wobbling dive the De Haviland mushed downward. Terrific bumps caused it to teeter from side to side, and occasionally it was lifted upward by the warm air-currents from small patches of unshaded sand.

Fifty feet off the ground MacDowell thought he had a chance to make the clearing. If he could stall into it and roll head on into the trees it might be possible that the wings would break the shock, and only minor injuries result.

Just short of his goal, however, the half-stalled De Haviland dropped away beneath him. He tried to throw it into a bank in order to hit a tree wing first instead of head-on. He succeeded partially—the motor and left wings tore through gnarled mesquite branches. The right wings snapped downward and hit the ground. The fuselage flipped over to the right, three-quarters of the way on its back. The grinding crash of spars and struts combined with the snappings of twigs and the ripping sound of the torn linen as the wings buckled under them. Pieces of the shattered propeller filled the aim, and a cloud of sand obscured the wreck.



WHEN the sand subsided the dazed pilot found himself hanging head downward, a foot from the ground. He unsnapped his belt and dropped in a heap. He clawed his way out of the wreckage, and found Trowbridge. The tail of the ship was undamaged, pointing diagonally upward, and the old man was hanging upside down, cursing prodigiously.

Tex unsnapped the safety-belt and tried to hold him, but despite his efforts the sheriff dropped the five feet downward and plowed face-first through the soft sand.

He got to his feet, spewing sand from his mouth and sneezing it from his nose. It rained from his mustache and got into his mouth when he tried to formulate blasphemy suitable to the occasion. He wiped it out of his eyes, pounded it from his clothes and clawed it out of his mouth.

"There's a house a quarter of a mile or so ahead; let's get there and see whether they've got a phone," suggested the chuckling MacDowell, and Trowbridge nodded mutely.

He glanced malevolently at the heap of linen and wood and metal that had been the ship, and followed Tex through the trees.

As they emerged into the open a man shot from the small shack in the adjoining field like a seed squirted from a squeezed lemon. He was followed, in single file by a woman and three children. He ran toward them lop-sidedly, carrying what was apparently a pail full of water. His family were waving assorted bottles and rags.

Trowbridge had expectorated enough sand to make speech possible.

"I c'n use all that water tuh flush out my mouth," he stated. "I hit wide open."

"He's got a phone," Tex pointed out. "See the wires? You wait here and I'll flag him."

He broke into a long-legged lope, running to meet the rescue party. As he ran he sized up the ragged cotton patch. It was big enough to land in, and the cotton was less than three inches high. The furrows were low, and ran the long way of the field.

"Nobody hurt. Can I use your phone?" he yelled to the lumbering water-carrier.

"Shore! Crashed, didn't yuh?"

"No—we always land that way!" Tex told him as he ran past.

He found the phone in the tiny front room, which did duty as a bedroom, and got a prompt answer.

"Who is this?" he enquired.

"Bealton operator," came the answer.

Bealton was seven miles away.

"This is Lieutenant MacDowell of the Border Patrol, and Sheriff Trowbridge. It's important official business, and we want the McMullen flight of the Border Patrol right now!"

All three names meant something, and service was fast. In three minutes Pop Cravath was on the phone.

"Cracked up a minute ago. Send another ship, Pop, one with guns on it. You know that first big patch of mesquite near Bealton? Crashed in it. Nobody hurt. Good field between mesquite and a house—western edge. Got it?"

"Uh-huh. How can the wrecking-trunk get there?"

"Through Bealton. Road from there to this place. I don't know the name, but it's the house nearest the mesquite. Don't waste any time, will you?"

"The ship's half-way there already!" barked Cravath, and Tex hung up.

He found the sheriff roosting mournfully on a fence-rail which sagged beneath his weight. He had taken off his helmet, and his iron-gray hair was in wild disarray. He was still pursuing stray bits of sand with a horny finger and fishing them out of his mouth.

"It won't be long before we're under way," Tex informed him. "I suppose the folks are looking at the ship?"

"Uh-huh."

Tex rolled a cigaret and perched beside Trowbridge.

"I've been thinking about the lay down there in Carana. Strikes me that if your deputy was shot there must be something up that's important enough so that there'll be no attempt to get across the border," he drawled. "The man that overheard this Charley talk could have slipped away and got to Mexico without any shooting. He had something up he wanted to put through. Big money, evidently. Do you suppose Van is dead?"

"I hope not, for more'n personal reasons," grunted Trowbridge.

"If this gunman has something so —— important under way," said Tex, "and he's sticking around, it strikes me we're liable to get action in one way, maybe. This unknown must have heard that you were at the field. Everybody along the Border knows that you fly a lot, having a besotted taste for the air, and that several times you've done a little official business from a ship, so to speak. You and Cap'n Kennard buzzed around Carana once before and did a little low-and-lofty machine-gunning when you nabbed those spigs that were running wops into this country. So Carana is fully aware of the execution a ship can do."

"You reckon the *hombre* we're after'll figure that?"

"Don't see why he wouldn't. Any dumb-bell knows that one kick through a control or a wing puts a ship out of whack. If this bird, when he realized who your deputy was, just aimed to save his hide he'd have slipped away for the river. He was willing to take a chance on murder to put his scheme across. When he shot he didn't figure on a ship, maybe, but it's a cinch he will be when he thinks things over. He must have confederates in Carana, and they'll put him wise. If he still wants to take a chance, getting his drugs north or whatever he's up to, he's probably laying low waiting for darkness. If he's got any brains at all, he'd try to put our ship out of commission so he couldn't be chased by it or be under our machine guns."

"Maybe yo're right," admitted the sheriff.

"And ten to one I'm all wrong. When he shot he probably didn't figure on your knowing so well what happened at the other end of the line. Who's this Twin Connelly that you mentioned?"

"Born in Arizona and spent half his life in Mexico fightin' with whichever bunch made the most *dinero*. He an' his twin brother had a fight down there and Twin killed 'im."

A FAINT, far-away hum, like the buzzing of some monstrous bee, drew their eyes eastward. Neither of them could see a ship, although the noise of the motor became steadily louder.

"Coming in low," stated MacDowell.

The little family who had come to their rescue stalked out of the mesquite, scrutinizing the sky eagerly for the ship. The roar of it was now so loud that the ship could not be more than half a mile away.

It flashed into sight like a comet, a hundred feet above the mesquite. A hooded figure in the front cockpit waved at them. The ship circled the cotton field once, drove back over the mesquite, banked around and rushed back toward the field. The motor died gradually, and the D. H. dropped across the trees and floated along above the field. It was a beautiful stall-landing, and to one less expert would have meant disaster, for even as it was the wheels dug deeply into the soft earth and the tail flipped a foot into the air. Not far enough to break the propeller, however, and the tail-skid settled to the ground before any harm was done.

Jimmy Jennings climbed out and the marooned pair got in.

"Help me turn her around for the take-off!" yelled Tex above the noise of the motor, and Jennings nodded.

"Where's the wreck?" he shouted

"In the 'squite. Those people'll show you. Ready, sheriff?"

Trowbridge was, and MacDowell gave the ship the gun. Jennings, at one wing-tip, threw his weight against it and helped turn the ship. He ran alongside it as it taxied through the soft earth, and turned it again close to the trees. The next second the throttle was all the way on and the ton-and-a-half bomber was plowing through the soft earth.

A fence was the only obstacle, but MacDowell became convinced that they would not even make it across that low barrier. Each time the De Haviland gathered speed it ran into a particularly soft spot or high furrow that slowed it. Seventy-five yards from the fence he started rocking it back and forth with the stick, trying to free the wheels from the clinging loam.

A short distance from the fence the ship staggered into the air, and he fought to keep it there. It did not drop back, but the margin of flying-speed was practically negligible. He nosed down slightly to pick up speed, and at the last moment pulled back on the stick.

There was a slight jar, and the ship wobbled for a moment. Again he nosed over, picked up speed just off the ground, and cleared the house by a hair. The landing-gear had demolished one section of fence, and he took time to circle and search the ground for a wheel. Evidently the landing-gear was intact, but one tire might have blown out. If so, it would mean a probable wreck on the next landing.

Had George Hickman been in the back seat he could have climbed around and taken a look at the wheel, and if necessary shot the other tire to equalize the wheels for landing. However, that was beyond the sheriff's powers, and the only thing to do was land as slowly as possible and trust to luck.

He flew two hundred feet above the

ground to save time. Fields, houses, patches of mesquite flashed past with dizzying speed. In a few minutes the big bend of the river was in sight, then the isolated little group of shacks that was Carana. The field was between the town and the river, he knew, so he banked southward.

A twisting dirt road which petered out a mile from the river was his guide, and he picked up a long, narrow stubble field quickly. He turned to Trowbridge, pointed and the old man nodded.

In line with his estimate of possibilities, he did not land immediately. Instead, he circled widely around the field, scrutinizing the ground closely. If he had been running the show down there, he would have planted a man, or himself, near the place where a ship would land, for the purpose of putting the ship out of order at the earliest possible opportunity. The patrol had made the whole Border realize how deadly pursuit from the sky can be.

Nevertheless, it was a pleasing surprize to pick up what might be a man, motionless in a thick patch of undergrowth alongside the field. He banked, circled back and flew low over the spot. Several mesquite trees grew close together there, and their intertwining limbs made a thick screen. Bushes completed what was a perfect hiding-place. Had he not been particularly watchful, he would not have noticed that dark patch on the ground which might be a man lying motionless.

He pointed it out to the sheriff, and the veteran took one look and nodded violently.

Tex circled back and shot for the field, gliding as slowly as possible. He had a plan for the safe capture of that man below, if there was a man and he stayed where he was.

With all his skill he handled his ship with the object of making the slowest possible landing. Four feet above the ground the ship hovered for the drop, and MacDowell jerked the stick back all the way. The nose rose in the air, and the bomber dropped like a stone. Its forward speed was not over fifty miles an hour. It swerved to the left sharply, and the left wing dipped until the wing-skid dragged the ground. He jammed the stick over to the left and thrust on full right rudder, helping out with a burst of power from the engine. The left tire was flat.

He counteracted the skid before the wing itself had been shattered against the ground, and in a moment the ship had stopped rolling close to the southern edge of the field.

TEX looked across the fifty-yard stretch of stubble to the spot which he was almost certain hid a man. A thick fringe of bushes made an impenetrable screen for anything behind them.

"Tire blowed out, ain't it?" yelled Trowbridge, leaning over the narrow cowling between the cockpits.

"Uh-huh. Put a bullet in the other one so we'll be ready for action, will you?"

"Shore. Think there's a man over yonder?"

"Pretty sure of it, sheriff. If whoever's running this *soirée* knows the border he's bound to figure on a ship dropping in. We can get him without taking a chance. Just taxi up and let the motor be our fort."

"That's talkin'," approved the old-timer.

He climbed out, put a bullet through the good tire and got back in again. Tex opened the throttle slightly and turned the ship until it was pointed directly toward the spot where he was convinced a man was hiding. He taxied slowly toward the bushes, taking care to keep an absolutely straight course. The huge Liberty and its radiator sloped sharply upward from instrument board to propeller, and provided a perfect defense for a bullet coming from any point directly ahead.

However, the possibility of being shot at was very remote, to his mind, for in all probability the man would have as his main objective the hiding of the fact that he was there at all. If discovered, there would be no proof of anything against him, which he would realize and act accordingly. He would hardly give himself away by a shot, even if cornered.

The propeller was whirling only a few feet from the bushes when Tex cut the motor to idling speed and turned to the sheriff.

"Do your stuff!" he grinned.

Which the sheriff proceeded to do in tones loud enough to wake the dead.

"Come out o' there, whoever yuh are!" he shouted. "We'll shoot them bushes down in about one minute!"

There was nothing but the whisper of the idling motor and the stirring of foliage in the Gulf breeze to answer him.

"I ain't bluffin', and yore listenin' tuh

Sheriff Trowbridge! See if this'll bring yuh out!"

He shot twice, aiming high.

"Do not shoot, *señor!*"

It was an anguished wail of pure fright. The bushes heaved, and a Mexican, hands in the air, came forth from the leafy depths.

"Took a trick, by ——!" bellowed the delighted Trowbridge. "Walk around here, mister, and let's see what we got."

What they had was a squat, powerful-looking Mexican in worn leather chaps, flannel shirt, gaudy red handkerchief and a much-crushed straw sombrero, which he held in one up-flung hand. A six-shooter was in a holster at his belt.

"What you doin' prowlin' around in them bushes?" demanded Trowbridge, a truly awe-inspiring figure as he towered in the cockpit above the beady-eyed captive.

"I was asleep, *señor*," was the answer.

"Pretty bed-room yuh got!" snorted Trowbridge.

"Wait a minute and I'll see how pretty it is," said MacDowell as he clambered out of the ship. "Looks rather quite too too."

It was. Those bushes had not grown so thickly, but the spot had been made into a perfect blind by the addition of extra branches and uprooted shrubbery.

The prisoner's assurance, which he had regained after getting over his fear of being shot, evaporated quickly when Tex reported his discovery.

"Wove yoreself a nice little nest," commented the sheriff. "Get that shootin'-iron, will yuh, Tex? Where d'yuh keep yore knife, *amigo*?"

"You 'ave no right—" commenced the Mexican, but the sheriff interrupted:

"Mebbe not, but we're doin' it. Had his knife in his boot, eh? Good. Now the question is——"

"Here comes the first visitor," Tex told him, pointing across an intervening patch of ragged cotton.

There was a horseman coming, and the cultivated field did not stop him. He was belaboring his bony steed with might and main, urging him through the drooping cotton plants.

"Another spig. I been wonderin' why we didn't see nobody in the fields, and it just struck me the shootin' brought 'em all intuh town. This *hombre's* —— bent fur election—ten tuh one that old bag o' bones don't make the fence!"

Trowbridge had the winning end of the bet. The rider tried to make the horse jump, but to no avail. Thereupon the man flung himself off the horse and came the rest of the way afoot.

Their captive kept his eyes on the approaching man. All three waited silently for the new arrival to cover the distance. He seemed to be about eighteen years old, barefoot and ragged and an unmistakable Mexican.

"Señor Trowbridge?" he gasped breathlessly.

"Right. An' Lieutenant MacDowell. What's the matter?"

"Weel you protect me, *señor?*"

"Huh? From what?"

"I was—known to be Señor Charley Van's friend, an' he ees dead."

"Shore 'nough."

Trowbridge spoke quietly, as if musing. His puckered eyes rested steadily on the youngster, and he pulled at his mustache slowly.

"Come over here, son," he said suddenly. "You too, Tex. As fur you, mister, make a move an' I'll crack down on yuh."

They moved a few spaces away, out of the squat Mexican's hearing.

"Who shot Van?" demanded the sheriff bluntly.

"I do not know, *señor*. He was—what you call—phoning to you." The boy was groping for his words, speaking very slowly. "He was een the little room een back, by the phone. Thees morning, about noon——"

"Why do you say he was a friend of yours?" queried MacDowell, his eyes on the man they had plucked from the bushes.

"He 'elp me out three, four weeks ago, vairy much. I am hees friend."

"What about this white man, Connelly? Tell us all yuh know about what's been goin' on," commanded the sheriff. "In Spanish, if yuh'd rather."

The opportunity to talk in his native tongue released the flood-gates, and the young Mexican related what he knew in a rush of words. The sheriff interjected a few questions, and the boy answered them eagerly, gesturing incessantly. When he had finished the sheriff translated for MacDowell's benefit.

"About noon this kid here says he was in the store talkin' with Charley. Dalton an' his whole family went tuh Bealton fur the day. This kid knew that Charley was my deputy, Charley havin' told him an' fixed it so's Manuel here would keep his eyes and ears open and mebbe give Charley some information.

"About noon Twin Connelly moseys in the store, an' buys a lot o' supplies. Charley figgers there's somethin' strange about a white man blowin' intuh Carana, and finally spots the *hombre* as bein' Twin Connelly. Connelly drives away in a buckboard an' Manuel folluhs him, on Charley's orders, to see whichaway he goes. He sees 'im turn intuh this trail west an' reports to Charley. Charley leaves Manuel in charge o' the store an' tracks Twin, evidently. He's gone until about three o'clock, then comes back an' busts intuh the back where the phone is an' starts tryin' tuh get me. Takes 'im a long time, accordin' to Manuel, an' finally he gets me at yore place. Then the kid hears a shot, runs back, and Charley's dead's a door-nail. Manuel looks around, but don't see nothin'. He didn't think fast enough tuh ride out an' see if anyone took the trail Twin had in the mornin', but sticks by Charley's body instead o' really huntin' the murderer. The telephone has been smashed, too. A big crowd gathers, naturally—every spig in town is at the store. Then he hears our ship, slips out and rides after us. He says the noise o' the motor scared every livin' soul within an inch o' their lives. That's the reason nobody's out here. They're layin' low, not wantin' tuh get mixed up in what's goin' on."

"Did Connelly take the western road to Laredo?" enquired Tex.

"No—a little wagon-track a mile or so north o' here."

"What are you afraid of?" demanded MacDowell of the Mexican.

"There are many here whose beezness they would not like to 'ave known, *señor*, an'—I am suspec', I theenk."

"Twin Connelly comes in an' buys supplies," mused the sheriff. "That means he has a gang with him, don't it? Out in the mesquite somewheres. It's a hundred tuh one he ain't plannin' tuh settle down here, so that means he's prob'ly ridin' north with his bunch after dark by routes which don't take in many towns, if any. He's prob'ly smuggled a bunch o' aliens in last night, an' is startin' fur San Antone tuh deliver 'em.

"There's only one organized traffic along that line, an' only an' organized traffic' pay 'im enough tuh make 'im go as fur as he has tuh deliver."

"Chinks," said MacDowell lazily.

"Shore," nodded Trowbridge. "Twin gettin' from five to eight hundred dollars per man delivered in San Antone, prob'ly. They ship 'em over from Cuba. O' course, it might be a wealthy bunch o' wops or somethin', but I doubt it. We got the dope on this Chink-runnin'——"

"So did we," stated MacDowell.

"If we're right, what happened is this, prob'ly: Charley gets spotted sneakin' around the outfit, or somethin' like that. Twin don't knock 'im off right then, havin' nothin' tuh go on, but he or one o' his men does track Charley back tuh town, sneaks around an' gits tuh overhear Charley telephonin'. Twin or this man o' his hears my name, and from what Charley says finds out where I am. This takes away the last doubt, an' when he starts spillin' what he knowed this bird cracks down on 'im an' beats it. He figgers thisaway: Carana's got no law; some o' the spigs is small smugglers anyways, an' a shootin' don't mean nothin'. Even if I come down here, Twin lays low in an unknown place till dark, an' then travels north. Just on the chance that I'll use a ship—prob'ly some Carana confederate told 'im how Cap Kennard an' I worked on Carana before by ship—he hides this man out here tuh put the ship out o' commission after we leave it. He didn't think fast enough tuh realize that we'd hear the shot an' figger it so close."

"It sounds reasonable," agreed the flyer, drawing on a cigaret. "If we're right, there's a bunch laying in the brush around here that we've got to round up! Reckon a little bluffing would make this *hombre* over here talk?"

"Nothin' like tryin'," said Trowbridge briskly.

THE sullen captive darted enquiring glances at them as they approached him. He seemed to be gathering himself for the onslaught he felt was coming.

The sheriff planted himself within four feet of the Mexican and pointed a menacing forefinger at him to emphasize his words.

"Yuh'd better tell all yuh know an' save yore hide—or part of it," he stated.

He waited briefly, but the man did not even raise his eyes.

"We know that Twin Connelly is out here in the brush—" Trowbridge gestured vaguely at the whole northwest—"with a bunch o' men he's tryin' tuh get north. We know he killed Charley Van, the man that spotted yore whole gang. We know he put yuh out here tuh put a hole in this ship so's we couldn't chase 'im. Yuh talk an' tell me jest how many men Twin's got with 'im, what he's plannin', exactly, an' anything else yuh know an' yuh'll serve several years less in the hoosegow."

For a moment the frightened captive seemed about to speak. He moistened his lips repeatedly with a darting tongue, and his eyes shifted from face to face, and then back to the ground. Finally he shrugged slightly, and his stocky, powerful body seemed to relax.

"Aimin' tuh throw in with us an' talk?" snapped Trowbridge.

The Mexican shook his head.

"I 'ave done no wrong, an' I know nothin', *señor*," he said.

"—— he's got guts!" roared Trowbridge disgustedly.

MacDowell drew the sheriff one side.

"I'll go up, pick up that trail, spot Connelly's camp, radio to McMullen and Laredo for ships, and then keep watch," he said. "This fellow is gambling because we've really got nothing on him except that we found him like Moses in the mesquite."

The sheriff approved, so MacDowell wiped off his goggles, strapped his helmet, and climbed in the back cockpit of the De Haviland. He jazzed the throttle a few times to clean out the plugs, and then the young Mexican whom the sheriff called Manuel helped him turn around. He bumped along on flat tires to the end of the field, swept around and took off. The motor cut out several times on the take-off, as the carburetor float was affected by the rough riding due to lack of tires, and there was a breathless interval when it was a toss-up between clearing the fence or smashing through it. The plane topped the wire by a few inches, and the motor settled down to a steady, rhythmic roar of power.

Tex throttled the Liberty to fifteen hundred revolutions a minute and started to unreel the antenna. In a few moments there was a thin line of flashing light behind the ship, with a small, dull-colored weight at the end of it. This done, he picked up the rough trail which the young Mexican had described, and from his airy perch examined the terrane on each side of it.

Five miles west of Carana he found a rather large, tumble-down shack and a big open shed. There was no other habitation for miles on either side. Northward unending mesquite rolled away to the skylin lieke a gray-green sea. Alongside the shed was a buckboard, and at least twenty horses were grazing on the long grass surrounding the buildings.

As he droned around the cabin he saw two men come out and squint upward at him. He switched in the radio set, and tapped out his message. He called both McMullen and Laredo, and repeated the message twice to make sure they got it. Within an hour at least a dozen De Havilands should be there, carrying machine guns and two fully armed flyers each.

He looked downward as he reeled in the antenna. The men had disappeared, and all was quiet and peaceful beneath the slanting rays of the sun. He watched the house closely as he spiraled down to put into effect a suddenly conceived plan that would make assurance doubly sure.

He was only a hundred feet high when there came an eruption of men from the cabin and shed. Twin Connelly had evidently decided that the presence of a Border Patrol plane over his headquarters meant that the game was up.

"Too late, old-timer!" grinned Tex delightedly, and nosed down as he gave the ship full gun.

At the edge of the clearing he was only a foot high, and the De Haviland was roaring along toward the grazing horses.

Two horses were caught but the rest galloped ahead at top speed. He did a steep climbing turn as he came close to them, and took a few seconds to turn. The horses were stopping, just short of the fence, when he was pointed for them again. He had no time to watch what the men were doing, but sent his ship at their mounts. The cow-ponies jumped the fence this time and galloped ahead, closely bunched.

The big pilot was grinning like a Cheshire cat as he swooped past the milling group of men. The two horsemen shot at him, and he laughed aloud. A target moving a hundred and twenty miles an hour is not as big as it looks. The men who had shot were the center of a gesticulating mob of Chinamen. The river was three miles southward, and MacDowell wondered whether the mounted men would ride for it.

Waiting interestedly to see what they would do, a plan flashed into his mind which might simplify matters. He found a pencil in his shirt pocket and an envelope in another. Using one knee for a desk, he wrote:

> **Twin Connelly: I've got machine guns. Stay where you are, all of you, or there'll be a cloudburst of bullets.**

He gripped the stick between his knees, thereby holding the ship reasonably level, and got a wrench from the tool-kit beneath the seat. He used his handkerchief to tie the note around the wrench. He banked around and went into a dive that would carry him past the men on the ground. He was barely a foot off the ground when he flashed past them, a few feet to one side. The ship shot upward, curving around them in a chandelle, and he dropped the wrench. Again the horsemen fired futilely. The wrench dropped within forty feet of its target, and one of the mounted men picked it up and read the note.

The De Haviland climbed steadily until the altimeter read a thousand feet. MacDowell unbuckled his safety-belt, crowded to the side of the cockpit, and stood up. His note had resulted in action exactly opposite to what he had hoped, he perceived. The two riders were galloping toward the horses, followed by the rest of their motley crew on foot. They were strung out in a ludicrous procession, running like mad.

He kept his left hand on the stick, partially controlling the teetering ship. The bumps were severe, and the bomber was being thrown around considerably. With his right hand he gripped the cowling of the front cockpit. There came an instant when the ship was practically level, and as he released the stick he lunged over the cowling between the two cockpits.

He landed in a heap in the other cockpit, hitting the stick and sending the ship into a tremendous dive that almost threw him out. There was a second of struggling to uncoil his long legs and free the stick. He held on desperately as he got in position and pulled the plane out of the dive. It finally came level, and gave him an opportunity to strap his belt, get his feet on the rudder, and bring it under control again. He was directly over the fleeing mob when he was ready for action. He had to be in the front seat to work his guns.

He spiraled down over them, and a hundred feet high straightened out. His dive carried him across the leading horsemen, and he pressed the machine-gun controls on the stick. The burst of bullets kicked up a cloud of dust fifty feet ahead of them.

As he zoomed upward he saw them slide their horses to a stop. He circled and waited. They would have a busy time trying to round up that bunch of horses as long as the Liberty held out.

The thought of possible motor-failure caused him to climb a bit. Two thousand feet would give him altitude enough to glide back to the landing-field, and he had no desire to land nearer than that to the outlaws below.

That one burst of bullets had evidently put the fear of death into the fugitives. The horsemen were standing now, and the rest of the men were walking toward them. He allowed that, for he wanted them together. There was no possible way they could make the river, and apparently they realized it.

As he got higher his eye caught a galloping horse on the trail leading to the rendezvous. Closer inspection revealed the fact that it was carrying two men.

"The sheriff and one of the Spigs!" chuckled MacDowell.

ALL that diving and zooming around had caused the sheriff to wax uneasy, doubtless, and he had used the Mexican's horse for transportation. When they got closer he could take the time to communicate with them. Their first captive was probably back at the field, safely tied.

Five minutes later Tex left his group of prisoners and swooped down alongside the sheriff. The younger Mexican was Trowbridge's companion, he perceived. The pilot motioned them back, and then nodded. The sheriff apparently comprehended that all was well, and slowed his horse to a walk.

The incident had taken less than a minute, but the desperate fugitives were attempting to take advantage of his absence. The two riders were galloping for the river, and the others streaming toward the horses, now a quarter of a mile away. MacDowell chose the men on foot for attention at first. One long burst, fired into the ground ahead of them, stopped their flight immediately. Ten seconds later he poured another spray of bullets close to the horsemen. They stopped likewise, and he swooped down and motioned them back, patting his machine guns significantly. They were wise enough to ride back, realizing their utter helplessness.

For half an hour the De Haviland rode herd on the group below, droning around in wide circles. Then six ships from Laredo took shape in the sky. Tex flew up close to the leader, pointed to the ground and with a flattened hand made the landing-signal. He pointed over toward the field and Captain Markham, the Laredo C. O., nodded. He led his formation to the field, and one by one they landed.

The McMullen ships, four in number, followed them in while MacDowell continued his patrol. The flyers took another half-hour to walk to the scene of operations, and then MacDowell watched the sheriff lead them into action. There were no fireworks of any description, although Tex half-expected a last desperate attempt to escape. The twenty flyers approached their victims in a big circle, and met with no resistance whatever.

As soon as the cavalcade started back toward Carana he dropped down toward the field in a gradual dive and landed. The other ships were lined up along the fence, so he had plenty of room.

He turned off the gas petcocks and let the motor run itself out of gas before he closed the switches. He got out, lighted a cigaret and treated himself to several chuckles while he took deep drags of the solacing weed.

He peered around for the Mexican who had been their first captive, but could not discover him.

"Maybe the sheriff put him back to bed," he reflected, and poked into the thick undergrowth where they had originally found him.

Sure enough, he was there, bound and gagged. The sheriff had used handkerchiefs and his vest for the purpose.

Tex removed the gag and likewise the red bandanna which was tied tightly around the Mexican's feet.

"We'll get out in the open," he drawled, and led the squat prisoner out on the field.

The man's beady black eyes swept the impressive line-up of bombers as if they were living monsters of which he was greatly afraid. Tex, smoking and watching closely, decided that the moment was opportune.

"Listen, *amigo,*" he said. "We've got Twin Connelly and everybody else in your gang, including the Chinks. None of you have a chance. The man that tells us exactly who killed Charley Van will get off more easily than the rest. D'you know what the penalty is for the kind of smuggling you're doing? Several years in jail per Chink. Come clean and help yourself."

"I not know, *señor!* But Tween he pursue the other gringo to Carana when we see him near the house——"

"That helps. In fact, it's plenty," grinned Tex. "Why did Connelly plant you here?"

"He over'ear the Señor Van——"

"And knowing the sheriff's reputation as an air-hound, figured he might come this way," nodded Tex.

"He did not theenk you would come for sure, *señor*, or that you knew so much," said the cringing Mexican, eager now to ingratiate himself with the flyer.

"Never thought of that shot traveling all the way to MacMullen," agreed MacDowell.

Soon the procession of captives marched on the field, surrounded by flyers. Tex waved a general greeting, and told the sheriff what he had learned. There was another Mexican among the prisoners, and one white man, whom the sheriff pointed out as the famous Connelly.

"Let's see what he's got to say for himself," suggested Trowbridge, and the other flyers drifted over toward the outlaw behind the sheriff.

Connelly was tall and gaunt, with a long, narrow horse face that seemed to be split from ear to ear by a thin, straight mouth. His small eyes were light gray, and eyebrows and eyelashes were so bleached by the sun that they were almost invisible. He was on a horse, somewhat apart from the twenty stoical Chinamen and the sullen, scared Mexican. Connelly sat his horse quietly and chewed tobacco with fatalistic calm.

"Guess we got yuh on two counts, Twin," boomed the sheriff. "One o' your Spigs testifies that yuh tracked Charley away from yore shack toward Carana, and the greaser on our side o' the fence that was in the store says yuh shot Van."

This exaggerated statement aroused no apparent emotion in the bony countenance of Twin Connelly.

"Well, what about it?" he inquired.

His light eyes rested steadily on MacDowell, and they were eyes which seemed to have plumbed all evil.

"Nothin', only it'd have saved trouble if yuh'd tried harder to git away," grunted Trowbridge.

"If I'd knowed, I would," drawled Connelly.

Trowbridge turned to MacDowell.

"The pilots are goin' home and the back-seat men are stayin' here tuh help me deliver this gang intuh Laredo in the mornin'," he said. "Go ahead home with yore ship, Tex. I'll git Charley's body off and then Manuel an' I'll git back tuh McMullen from Laredo. I'm takin' him with me. I might perhaps find good use for a Spig stool pigeon."

"We'd better get started," stated Captain Kennard, the stocky little commanding officer at McMullen.

The sun had disappeared below the horizon, and the western sky was a paling crimson lake.

In less than a minute the fast-working flyers had all the motors going, and after a brief warm-up the bombers crawled out for the takeoff. Kennard led his men off first, followed by Markham and the Laredo contingent. Tex, flying number two, slid in fifty feet behind the C. O.'s ship and fifty feet to one side of it. "Sleepy" Spears jockeyed into the same position on the left, and the other two planes completed the V in the two rear positions. A half-mile westward the Laredo formation took shape in the air.

Like two wedges of monstrous geese the formations took their separate ways eastward to McMullen and westward to Laredo, flying low and fast to beat the darkness home.

PEARL-HUNGER
A Five-Part Story
Part Two
by Gordon Young

Author of "Everhard and the Russian Count," "Ointment Pots," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

CAPTAIN BENNINGS, owner of the pearling schooner the *Gloria* died as hard as he had lived. He had been cheated by Fate, bowled over by a poisoned arrow just as he was about to put the *Gloria* about and make for the harbor of a Christian port.

His wife had left him years before, her pretty empty head turned by the flatteries of a rich youngster. She had taken one of her children—the golden-haired Margaret—with her, leaving him to bring up the other girl. And for that daughter Bennings had lived and worked, making his name to be feared in the South Seas, reaping a rich harvest of pearls.

He kept good men about him—they were all intensely loyal; specially Heddon, a big powerful man who feared no one—not even "Black" McGree.

It was to Heddon that Bennings entrusted his girl—the schooner was named for her.

"Take her to Lianfo, Will," he said just before he died. "Let the consul take care of her. You'll promise, Will?"

"Pearl-Hunger," copyright, 1924, by Gordon Young.

And Heddon had promised.

So to Lianfo they sailed after giving Bennings a sailor's funeral. The *Gloria* carried a native crew of twelve. Heddon, now, was captain; Raeburn, nothing much and old Wateman, the other white man on the vessel, was an odd piece of floatsam who was always sober at sea and always drunk on shore.

Lianfo was a copra port, south of the Samoans. It was settled by rich planters who drank and gambled while their women gossiped and danced.

There was a seamy district to Lianfo; a collection of gin shanties where beachcombers, half-castes and Chinamen—broken down, vicious fellows, clustered like chilled flies.

Most notorious of the gin shanties was the *Gallows*—the rotted hulk of a wrecked bark—run by Duclos, a mean vindictive Frenchman.

After coming to anchor at Lianfo Wateman and Heddon went ashore, although it was past midnight, Heddon wishing to be on hand to make a call on the consul first thing in the morning. He also planned to see Oxenham, a distant cousin of his. Heddon had always regarded Oxenham as "a fine fellow, but rather a bore; a man to be admired, but hardly liked."

Old Tom Wateman went ashore but for one thing—whisky!

And so, presently, the two found themselves in the *Gallows*.

They arrived just in time to hear the beachcombers plan to marry "Shanghai Ann"—a slovenly woman of the beach—to a young planter who was drunkenly announcing his intention to marry, "The wors' woman on Lianfo."

THE beach rat who had told the story and liked the importance it gave him, lifted his mug, tipping it upside down over his mouth, taking the last drop, holding it there by way of hint that the mug was empty and his thirst unassuaged. The hint was successful. The brawny tattooed sailor, with the smell of copra on him, bawled for drinks all round and dropped, with heavy clink, a leather pouch on the table.

The bartender, a fellow with some sort of perpetual sores on his face that grew scabby but never entirely healed, tossed away the cigar stub, on which he had been chewing for an hour, and lazily shuffled toward the bar.

Heddon and Wateman, who had come up to the group unnoticed, had listened and heard.

A beachcomber pushed back his chair with noisy scrape and went to the table at which the man who was to marry Shanghai Ann lay face down on folded hands.

"Come on, matey! It's all settled. Have a drink!"

The figure in the shadows stirred, raised up unsteadily. He was drunk, but something more than drunkenness was in him. He sat like one apart, doomed to shadows; only his outline and movement vaguely showed.

"Come on!" cried the beach rat, taking his arm, pulling to lift him. "Come on. We'll have a drink, then out to sea. Sanderson'll marry you!"

The drunken man held back, impatiently resisting. His voice carried indistinctly in a thickly mumbled protest.

"Like ——!" answered the beach rat. "You can't back out now. After all I done for you! I should say not." He called in an aggrieved voice toward Duclos: "This guy's tryin' to shift his helm on us. Says now he won't do it!"

"That fellow, we'll show him!" cried the brawny sailor, thumping his money-bag up and down on the table.

"We'll make him go through with it!"

"Aye!"

"We're with you, Ann!"

"Aye, we'll make him do it!" a fellow shouted, rising from the table to start across the deck.

Heddon pushed the fellow back—

"You fellows take a drunken man and marry him to that!"

He made a contemptuous back-handed gesture toward the wreck of a beach woman.

Silence, except for the scraping of chairs and feet, followed as the group turned surprized inquiring eyes on Heddon, stranger and spoil-sport.

Old Tom Wateman, used to beach shanty rows, sensed the coming of trouble and with an alert, sidewise, crab-like movement, warily stepped to one side, stopping near a stool. He had been in the *Gallows* before, knew its reputation, knew of Duclos.

The scraping of feet stopped. A hush came. There was for a moment or two no movement but the flickering dance of shadows thrown off from the ill-burning lanterns.

Hard eyes were turned on Heddon, weighing him, judging him, and they saw that he was a big man, broad of shoulders, slim of waist, with a knotted face that yet somehow lacked the coarseness which gave kinship with their own kind; his hands were slim and long, his upstanding bearing suggested a caste distinction.

Among them were many men, any one of whom would, in a quarrel's growth, have hesitated to fight him; but there were enough now together for a glimmering of mob spirit.

"Who in —— are you?" demanded the tattooed sailor.

He stood up, slowly twisting his leather sack of dollars tightly about a fist, making a weapon far better than knuckle-dusters.

"Go to it, Buxton!"

"Eat 'im up, Buxton!"

"You're the lad. Buxton!"

"What's your call to meddle?" Buxton demanded, widening his eyes, glaring at Heddon.

"You'd better be gittin' out while you c'n walk!" a man well sheltered behind Buxton's shoulder shouted across toward Heddon.

"Lay aboard him, Buxton!" Sanderson grunted heavily, then sucked the fringe of his mustache between his teeth and chewed on it.

"You heard all I have to say," Heddon answered. "You're not going to marry that drunken fool, whoever he is, to any hag of a beach woman. If he were sober—but if he were sober he wouldn't do it. No man's fool enough!"

"What's the matter of me?" Ann screamed, jabbing her elbows right and left and stepping out with swaying lurch of crippled leg to where Heddon could see her.

"Everything," he said coldly, looking at her starved, sharp face, thin as if eaten away under the skin.

Her eyes blazed.

"Well, I am what you men have made me!" she cried, shaking a skinny fist as if personally blaming him. "I never had a chanct! He wants to marry me. I'm goin' to do it! I'll make him a good wife. I will. I got it in me. What the —— you got to say about it anyhow——"

Then she swore, blind with anger. Her voice was rasping and throaty from whisky, cigarets, disease. Heddon eyed her much as he would have eyed a leper.

"Shut up!" Buxton told her, pushing out with his arm to shove her away, clearing room for himself.

Others told her roughly to shut up. They wanted to see a fight, not to hear a woman in a rage. She would not be quieted. Two men took her, jerked her back, held her as she struggled and screamed.

"Now, *go* for him, Buxton!"

Buxton swung back his weighted fist, braced himself to lurch, but stopped. Duclos had stepped out, holding up a slender hand, checking him with a gesture; and to Heddon, Duclos said—

"*Monsieur*, what affair of yours is this?"

"Not a —— bit," said Heddon, "more than it should be of any other man. You've got a fellow over there drunk, and you've got that—" he jerked a hand toward the woman—"and you think it a joke to marry them. I'll be —— if you do!"

Duclos's thin lips twitched from side to side with rippling enigmatic movement. His dark eyes had the brilliancy and steadiness of a hawk's.

"Back—back," he said impatiently to those behind him, gesturing, stepping backward as they gave way. "Blood of a saint, back!" Then smoothly to Heddon: "Ah, *monsieur*, there *is* something to be said about that. You will be ——, will you? *Monsieur*, it is the truth!"

He had stepped back, well beyond Heddon's reach, and a knife, double-edged, narrow of blade, flashed out of the black sash; and he held it up-lifted to throw, smiling, cat-like, with triumph.

"You will meddle now?" he asked with insolent softness.

A hurtling stool came through the air, making for Duclos's head. It took him squarely and knocked him over. Right after the stool, almost as if he too had been thrown, old Wateman came; he pounced on Duclos, snatched away the knife and, with a seaman's contempt for steel in a brawl, flung it forward. It clattered in among the rubbish of boxes and bottles.

Then the fight was on.

Buxton swung a fist far back and drove it at Wateman; but Heddon stopped the blow by an over-the-shoulder drive to Buxton's jaw that knocked him staggering in futile groping back against the Kanaka musicians, one of whom dropped his guitar. The next instant it crashed underfoot.

There was a turbulence of vague movement on all sides, quick oaths and a trampling jar, women's fluttering cries—though there was nothing fluttering about Shanghai Ann's yells—the thud of blows, crack of breaking wood.

Heddon was powerful, quick of movement, and had been well-bruised and schooled by rough-and-tumble brawls where there were many against him. He had the insolence of great strength so that odds, though they might count, yet counted for little.

He seized a chair by its back, swung it up to gather force and in the upward swing struck and extinguished a lantern. Instantly shadows rushed in, deepening the gloom. With a downward side-sweep of his chair Heddon struck a man that was lunging for him and the man dropped, face down, arms out and lay quiet. Heddon sprang back and sent the chair whirling from his hands at men who had bunched together and were rushing.

"Come on! Come on!" old Tom bawled, jumping about, brandishing his fists.

But somebody clouted him on the back of the head with a bottle and, face forward, he went down and lay motionless.

Duclos cursed and urged men at Heddon, then suddenly became silent. A moment later Ann's voice broke off in crescendo and was not heard again; but there were other voices, shouting in oaths, bellowing, and the crash and clatter of over-turned chairs and tables, the stamp of heavy feet.

Another lantern went out. The room was nearly dark. Men slammed missiles at one another, thinking each was Heddon, who dodged about rapidly, hurtling chairs, stools, anything that came to hand.

Heddon heard the running of feet on the deck overhead, but did not know what of it, had no time to think. Old Wateman was down and out, and he would not leave Wateman.

BUT one lantern remained burning. That was over the stern stairs. In the darkness Heddon confused the men that were after him. There was heavy breathing but less shouting.

The voice of the bartender shouted:

"Get in behind him, boys— Lay 'im out— Duclos wants 'im laid out— Go for him— What the ——'s the matter with you men? Put him down— Duclos wants him tied up——"

"Aw, shut up," Buxton's voice growled. "Where is Duclos? Why don't he help? An' them other fellers—where's Sanderson an'——"

The bartender yelled triumphantly:

"Duclos has carried 'em off to be married! He wants us to save this fellow till mornin'—he told me so!"

"That's a fine trick!" a man cried, disgusted. The clatter of a stick on the deck followed. He had thrown away his club. "Duclos quits us—I quit too!"

Grumbles and curses came from other voices. The fight-spirit died down. They had been cheated. Duclos' and Sanderson's going, together with two or three others, was like the desertion of a captain who took favorites with him.

Buxton turned his unprotected back toward Heddon and demanded hotly of the bartender—

"You mean Duclos has carried 'em off an' left us fellows here?"

"Put that fellow down!" bawled the bartender excitedly. "Duclos wants him tied up!"

"Aw, do it yourself then!" a man shouted disgustedly, while Buxton, slow of thought, incredulous, stared at the bartender as if having some trouble to believe what he had learned:

"So they've gone over the side? Well, they can keep goin,' clear to —— for all o' me. Mate—" he turned toward Heddon—"you was right anyhow. It's a blasted trick to do any man. I was a —— fool. I'm always bein' a —— fool!"

The bartender loudly protested and tried to stir them up again, promising that Duclos would make it all right with them. He was answered sullenly.

"*You* make it right now!" said Buxton. "Get out somethin' to drink—for ever'body." He significantly pocketed his leather pouch. "You—this is on the house!"

"No, it's not!" shouted the bartender.

"Ain't hunh? We'll show you. Come on, boys, ever'thing's on the house!"

And it was. Buxton went behind the bar and recklessly slammed out bottles. The bartender complained in a sort of whining fury, saying what Duclos would do when he learned. But Duclos was off in the far future. Buxton grew tired of the whining threats and ran the bartender up the stern stairs and over the side; then Buxton stood on the poop waving a bottle, from which he took a deep drink now and then, and jeered the dark form of the bartender, stumbling along through the sand in the moonlight.

When he went back below he set about encouraging the men to wreck the place. They smashed bottles, sang and whooped. The Kanaka musicians and girls had fled.

Wateman sat in a chair, holding a tin cup half-full of whisky and inquiringly felt all over his body to see what was loose and missing.

"How do you feel, Tom?" asked Heddon.

"Who hit me?"

"I don't know."

"With all this deck for yer feet, you fellers had to use me to fight on. I got the toothache all over me. Where's the lad that got us into this? He ought t'ave a punch on the jaw. I'll give it him!"

"He's getting worse. They carried him off to the ship—out to sea. He'll be married to that *thing* before he comes back."

"Serves 'im right," said Wateman. "Who the —— was he?"

"Only another idiot. The world's full of such. Got a drunken whim—and will wake up with the —— on his back."

Buxton came to them, waving a bottle and singing.

"Here ol' mate," said Buxton, "let's fill 'er up. Hold yer cup—why don't you hol' it still."

"Who was that feller?" asked Wateman. "Him this row started off over?"

"Him? Ho, he was goin' to marry Peg Cardan—prettiest woman in the world, that Peg Cardan. I only seen her onct. That there glimpse'll last me a lifetime. That was las' month when I was in here. 'Nother feller was goin' to marry her then. Naval off'cer. But she throwed the off'cer over for this feller. Then she throwed this one over for ol' Jeffries. Know ol' Jeff? Biggest planter on the island. I'm workin' for him. Mean ol' ——. But he's got money. That Peg Cardan she's been here three months an' engaged to three men. Prettiest woman on earth. I know. I seen 'er. Ol' Jeff won't let her get away from him. He never lets nothin' get away from him. That's why this Ox'ham took it so hard. He knows——"

"Who?" asked Heddon.

"Ox'ham. He's young planter. Him an' Jeff is enemies. An' here's the joke—this here is a joke. Ox'ham, he's one o' them fellers that don't drink. An' see what happens to 'em? They don't know how to handle it when they do get a little on board—makes 'em crazy. Won't ol' Jeff laugh!"

Buxton went off, swaying. Other men were leaving, staggering off with pockets and arms filled with bottles. A glint of uneasiness as to how Duclos would feel about having his place wrecked had got in under the drunkenness of most of them, and they were making off, greedily carrying more than they could hold; staggering, dropping bottles, stooping for them, dropping other bottles, climbing laboriously up the stairs, swearing.

Heddon looked after them, watching them lumbering about in the light of the solitary lantern, but not thinking of them. The last figure climbed up, merged into the shadows of the companion way and was gone. The enormous space of the *Gallows* was empty, silent, as if she were a derelict at sea instead of on a sandy beach. Absently he stooped and picked up the rung of a broken stool, looked at it, idly tossed it away. It struck the deck, sending off clattering echoes.

"Ox'ham—Ox'ham," muttered old Tom. "Ain't that him, Will?"

"Yes," said Heddon broodingly.

"Unh. That's bad, Will. If we'd only knowed——"

"But that other name—Cardan. Remember it?"

"Cardan? Seems like— No— I—yit where'd I ever hear it? I heard it somewheres, ain't I?"

"I've heard it enough times. Old Bennings—that's the name he cursed when he was dying."

"Oh, I'm minded now."

"Peggy—Margaret Cardan—'Little Margie,' all grown up now," Heddon said bitterly. "I wonder how much the dead know, Tom, or can have to do with the living? About the last thing he said was, 'If daughter of mine ever plays with man I'll—' and if she brought Oxenham to this, by ——, I'll—I'll—I don't know what I will do. Nothing I suppose. And yet——"

VII

THE vague light of false dawn glowed in the east, light without illumination that seemed in fact to darken the face of the earth, pressing all outlines into flat or bulky shadows. The moon had gone behind the high hills of the island. Excepting where the ocean curled into froth its surface was black, but there was the stir of life in its blackness and its voice in a heavy sibilant *shuuahsh* was heard on the beach. The chill of tropic dawn was in the air.

They walked along the beach, plowing unsteadily through the deep white sand, soft and white as snow, with the scrunch as of snow underfoot. Heddon's face was set with an ugly sternness. He tramped with a long stride, saying nothing, but as if he knew where he was going and had no time to lose. Wateman puffed and broke into frequent trots to keep up.

By the time they entered the village it was daylight, and there was a great stir of barter and gossip in the market-place where the natives gathered. Fruits and vegetables were heaped on mats and trays; live chickens, feet bound together, sprawled helplessly; mounds of fish glittered, the freshness of the ocean still on their bright scales. They were like jeweled fish, such as are told of in Arabian tales. Venders sat about, smoking, haggling, chattering in the midst of high-pitched laughter. Servants from the wealthy homes in the village were shopping and gossiping; mostly gossiping this morning for the Kanaka musicians and girls from the *Gallows* had spread the story of Oxenham and Shanghai Ann.

The white residents were never up at dawn. For most of them the days were too long no matter how late they arose.

As Heddon strode along, erect, sullenly preoccupied, many dark girls turned their eyes and flashing teeth admiringly toward his tall, broad form. They were intensely curious. He was a fine looking man, but his face was hard set and he seemed to see no one. Wateman, a little wobbly, struggled to keep up.

Heddon stopped before a sleepy old fruit dealer who held a half-eaten banana in one hand and a half-smoked cigar in the other.

"Where is the American consul's house?"

The old fellow wrinkled his forehead, stared up at Heddon with sphinx-like gravity, then crammed the remains of the banana between his sunken cheeks, looked away through the foliage and pointed vaguely.

A little crowd was around Heddon. Many voices talked at once, good-naturedly eager. A small boy, hair freshly wet from his morning's swim and half-naked, was reluctantly pushed forward before Heddon, and a pretty girl, laughing up at him, said the boy would show the way. Without thanking her, Heddon urged the boy on.

Wateman, saying that he would wait, dropped heavily into the shade. His head ached. His legs felt limber. He was half-drunk. At once the natives gathered round with questions. He swore at them.

Heddon, with the small brown, nearly naked child trotting at his side, went through the town along a shaded street and up a wide winding road to higher ground where many large houses, all painted white—and some had gables and ornate scroll-like work over them to show that their owners could afford architectural doodads—sat in well-kept gardens.

The boy stopped before the driveway of one of these and pointed, then gazed up with anxious expectancy. Heddon did not look down, but strode into the grounds. The boy waited until Heddon was some way, then jeeringly called him bad names in beach-comber English—"cheap-skate" being the mildest. But Heddon was too occupied with what he was about to notice.

He went up the steps and across the wide veranda. With a quick glance all about he decided from the look of things that the consul was a rich man.

Heddon knocked loudly at the first door he saw, and, getting no answer, went along the veranda until he came to another door, on which he banged as if to break it in.

A native man, barefooted, in a white suit with the blouse unbuttoned and flaring as he ran, came racing from somewhere and shouted indignantly:

"Here, you fellow, stop that noise you make! What you want, you fellow?"

"To see the consul."

"No can see him now. You go way. Come back ten o'clock. You go!"

The native pointed toward the distant gate. Heddon hated natives anyhow. He grasped the man's arm, jerked him around and fastened a hold on his neck.

"Take me to the consul, now," said Heddon.

The native wriggled and protested. The consul was in bed; consul never saw any one until he had breakfasted; consul wouldn't like it if disturbed; but the fellow's protests were as ineffectual as his struggles.

"You order Americans off the grounds when they come on business to see their consul, do you?"

With that Heddon opened the nearest door and bodily thrust the fellow through, saying—

"Lead the way!"

"He sleep!" the native wailed.

"He won't be long."

"You wait here. I tell him. You wait—you stop along here!"

"I'll crack your neck. Move along!"

They crossed the large dim room and, with the native being forced along rather than leading, went up a stairway down a wide hall. Then the native timidly stopped before a door and said in a frightened voice:

"This the room. He asleep!"

Heddon rapped with clenched fist. Vibrations rattled through the big hall, startling echoes until they chittered. From faraway within the room an impatient drowsy voice called:

"What the ——'s going on there! Tauko? What on earth—Tauko?"

"Yes, sir!" answered Tauko weakly.

"What are you up to? What do you mean——"

The voice came nearer as it was speaking. The door opened with a jerk and a young man with touseled straw-colored hair, sleep still in his eyes, and wearing striped silk pajamas, looked out angrily. Surprize mingled with the anger in his expression as he stared at Heddon, who towered beside the shrinking native.

"Who the —— are you?" he demanded.

Heddon regarded him doubtfully from bare feet to rumpled hair. This was a young man, not more than thirty, if that, rather chubby, of rather cheerful though weary features. The mouth was wide, the eyes a thin blue.

Heddon pushed the native aside with a careless shove and took a step nearer—

"I want to see the consul—Mr. Sanborn."

"I'm the consul. Sanborn's dead—six months ago, seven now. But I don't see what consideration you expect to get, coming into a man's house this way!"

Heddon, with thumbs to belt, slightly squared his wide shoulders and frowned:

"It was the only way I could get to you. My business is important."

"It must be —— important," said the young consul, exasperated.

"It is. An American citizen was kidnapped off the beach last night and——"

The young consul yawned more or less deliberately, but kept his eyes on Heddon. Heddon looked rather different than the ordinary sailor, was bigger than most men, and was oddly distinctive with that long black hair and curiously knotted face. But to the consul it was no new thing to have men come and complain that their mates had been shanghaied by some copra trader. Copra traders needed sailors and Lianfo needed copra traders; therefore official Lianfo did not greatly excite itself over the way that schooners fill their crews.

"But my good man," said the young consul, "why come at this beastly hour and in this way to tell me?"

Heddon's fist smashed into his palm with a report that caused the nervous Tauko to duck and made the young consul start.

"I am not your good man," Heddon growled. "I had personal business with Mr. Sanborn, and I have official business with the American consul—whoever he is!"

YOUNG Mr. Rolland, the American consul and son of one of the island's wealthiest planters, suddenly realized that this was no ordinary sailor with a drunken complaint. Rolland was good-natured. Every one called him "Bobby" and he liked it. He was something of a chatterbox and gossip; also badly spoiled by being petted in his home and out of it, particularly by women—though years before, just to be safely on the safe side, his parents had picked out the girl for him and married him to her. He was the sort that would rather make a clown of himself than be ignored. He had squirmed into the appointment as consul because he rather liked the meddlesome duties that the office could take unto itself, and the empty routine of the position gave him a feeling of importance. Now the harder he looked at Heddon the more he realized that this man had much more to him than showed in his rough and rather damaged dress, and his hard features did not quite mask the breeding that lay behind them.

"Just what is the matter?"

"Fred Oxenham was carried out to sea last night to be married to that hag of a beach woman they call Shanghai Ann."

"What! What the ——? No? What do you mean?"

"Just what I said."

"My lord, *no!* Oxey? Who did it? How did it happen?"

"Duclos—as a joke."

"Duclos? Oxey? My lord! Come in. Come in," said Rolland, rather confusedly stepping aside, and with one hand rubbing vigorously at his tousled head—as if to clear away sleep's cobwebs and make sure that this was not part of a dream.

Heddon walked heavily into the room. Rolland pushed the door closed and regarded him blankly:

"Oxenham! Duclos! My lord! What is your name?"

"Heddon. Will Heddon. I've been with the pearler, Sam Bennings, for two or three years."

"Oh, I know of you!" Rolland blurted, his face fairly exploding with eagerness.

He thrust out his hand.

"Oxey's talked of you a lot. Sit down. Here, have a cigaret. What the —— was going on last night? So *you* are Heddon? Lord, I'm glad you came. Tell me about it. What happened?"

"Duclos got hold of Oxenham while he was drunk. Took him and the woman out to sea with some skipper that has master's papers."

"Duclos would do a trick like that!" cried Rolland, waving an arm. "Poor old Oxey, he certainly has been catching —— these days. Tell me about it; how did it happen?"

Rolland, with a nervous gesture, poked a cigaret case at Heddon, took a cigaret himself and lighted a match. His hand trembled as he raised the flame. He could hardly hold it to the end of the cigaret.

Heddon told what he had come to tell, quickly, with hard-spoken, short sentences.

"Fire and thunder!" said Rolland, waving his cigaret about. "How that Peggy Cordan has messed things up here on this island! I knew she'd do it! I knew it the first time I saw her. She certainly has played the ——!"

There was something just a little tolerant in his reproach of her.

"She's had every man on the island by the ears," he explained. "She's a beauty and full of—I don't know what you'd call it. The —— I guess. There's something about her, though, that's different."

"They're all alike. That's why you think they're different," said Heddon.

"Sure, I understand. But she *is* different. I know a lot about her," Rolland went on in a gossipy flutter. "Name's not really Cardan. Her mother wasn't married to Cardan, you know. Cardan, he's rich. All the Cardans are rich. He pitched the old lady out after the bloom wore off. Gave her some money and all that, but threw her out. She tried to keep up pretenses they say, but you know, of course, you can't live a thing like that down. She wanted to marry Peg off well, but of course with that back of her nobody who is anybody would *marry* her. That's why she's down in the Islands. Men are less particular about who they marry. That is, some of them. You have to talk marriage to Peg—and have money. Old Jeffries has the money. He's rich, he is."

"And bought her in the open market?" said Heddon.

"Well, not exactly that. Very nearly, though. But sit down. I tell you all about it. Sit down, Heddon. Oxey's talked about you. Thought a lot of you. Queer fellow, Oxey. We were ragging him pretty hard at the club last night. He's so —— serious-minded we just couldn't help it. And we were a pack of asses! Thought it was a joke when he started in on the champagne. Never drinks anything, you know. One of those queer ducks that always try to do what's right. Silly notion, the way it works out with him anyhow. We told him he ought to go marry the worst woman he could find, as a joke. And my heavens, who'd have thought Oxey would take it up that way! That's terrible! But of course that marriage won't hold. What a joke—ugh!"

"And this Cardan woman will think it more of a joke than any of you," said Heddon, still standing, looking down at Rolland, who stood scraping his bare feet on the mat.

"You're right. She may at that. She's a heartless little wretch. Just threw Oxey over like that—*plunk!*"

"Has been engaged to three men in as many months, I hear."

"Well, you see, really the first didn't count. That was a moonlight affair with a young Naval officer on the *Dolphin*—on the other side of the island now, doing some surveying. 'Buddy' Masters, ensign. Nothing but his salary. Just about keep her in perfume. She sent him packing. She's visiting with the Dwights, and she is sure a whirlwind."

Again the tolerant glow of reminiscence appeared in Rolland's eyes—

"Somehow she isn't really a bad sort——"

"No," said Heddon. "I hear she wants a marriage contract in her bill of sale."

"You've sure got it in for her. But then you're a friend of Oxey's. Well, so am I in a way. Everybody on the island nearly fell over when she got engaged to Oxey. He's queer, you know. Never much for women. Doesn't drink. Won't gamble. Rather a prig, really. On the surface that is. He tumbled into her hands, right like that! Everything was all set for the wedding. He rented the Burnett house here in town. Knew she wouldn't want to live out on the plantation. Burnetts are spending a year in the States. He rented it. Then bluey—all off. Know why?"

"Oxenham's a poor business man."

"Yes. Two weeks later she was engaged to old Jeffries. Know what he looks like? Down East Yankee farmer with consumption. Chin whiskers, lean face, cold blue eyes, adenoids, grins a good deal but I can't say he ever smiles. Serve her right to have to marry that old baboon."

"But women of her sort have luck," said Heddon. "He'll die soon."

"He hasn't married her yet. I'm bettin' at the club that she won't go through with it. But say, excuse me till I get into some clothes. My family's all on a little jaunt down to Sydney. I'd have gone too—racing's on down there—but this consul business has got me more or less tied up. Too early in the morning for a bit of a drink? No? Good! I usually wait till after breakfast, but lord! This Oxey thing makes my nerves rattle." He went to the door and shouted: "Hi, Tauko! Tauko! Bring up the Scotch and soda." He paused for a moment, looking at Heddon: "Oxey used to say that you were strong as a mule and big as a house. You can usually depend on whatever Oxey says. Sit down. Make yourself at home. I'll get something on."

Rolland hurried about the room, scattering clothes to find what he wanted, then took a silk shirt and fresh flannels behind a sandalwood screen.

Tauko came in with the tray, and from the moment he entered until he sidled back through the door, he kept his eyes watchfully and curiously on Heddon.

From behind the screen Rolland paused again and again to look out with a sort of furtive curiosity. So this was that Will Heddon Oxenham had two or three times talked so much about; the big reckless fellow who had ruined his career and nearly caused international complications by slapping the face of a foreign ambassador's attaché. Over a woman, of course. A pretty, tricky, treacherous woman. She was engaged to Heddon, and told him of how the attaché had been offensive. But the truth was something different. Heddon's people and friends, having social and official standing in Washington, dropped him, ostracized him, carefully and publicly made it plain that he had been turned out of the family. The affair was a big sensation. And the woman, the pretty, tricky, treacherous woman, married the attaché whom she had loved all along.

Young Rolland busily reflected that life and love were deucedly uncertain. There was Peggy Cardan herself. He had been taken with her for a time; but he had not counted with Peggy. He was already married. It was surely silly of her to care about whether a man was married, when she would throw herself to old Jeffries. She was a little witch, Brilliantly golden hair. Her skin had the luster of a pearl. Her eyes were like sapphires. And that teasing "something" about her. She was a witch-girl.

Heddon broodingly reflected that he most surely could not leave Gloria with this American consul. He wished himself rid of her, but knew that he would be worse than faithless to Bennings's trust if she were left on this riotous island.

He searched his thoughts and could think of no one better than old Ben Stockton, a half-blind storekeeper on the Kulicos. It was not Stockton, but Stockton's family down in Sydney that Heddon considered. Stockton himself was a rather tall stoop-shouldered man, gentleman for all of his ill-luck, with an odd way of holding his head up, as even if though his body was bent under the burden he carried, his head was unbowed. Heddon knew him for something very like a martyr, burning himself up on the Kulicos that his family might be comfortable. Stockton was to be trusted. Heddon, more than any one else, knew about his family, and felt that with them Gloria would be better off than anywhere else he might put her.

Rolland, now dressed and looking natty and tropical, poured whisky into the glasses; and he was rather showing off, making it appear that a jolt of half a tumbler full on an empty stomach was nothing to him.

"Here's bad luck to all false women," said Rolland breezily, lifting his glass high.

"To all women!" Heddon answered.

Each drank to his version of the toast.

"By the way, old man, you must come over to the club and have breakfast with me. We can't do anything until Duclos and Oxey get back. I take my meals there while the family's away."

He was much interested, as far as curiosity went, in Heddon. It was quite a pick-up to have him in hand, show him off. He had been almost famous at one time, had at least been in all the papers. And everybody knew about the luck of old Bennings, the pearler. Was said to have a great fortune in pearls stowed away. Heddon's clothes looked a bit scrubby, but, being half-full of Scotch, Bobby Rolland rather lost his good opinion of clothes and was filled with a democratic glow.

EARLY as it was, there were many people at the club, and two or three women who had hurried down so as to miss nothing; they were rather fat and middle-aged and chattered in indignant excitement over the outrage—"outrage" being that Oxenham would do a thing like that.

Gossip, as usual, had taken the shape that was most delectably exciting.

The men, whether old or young—and some were mere clerks who used up their salaries months ahead in chits, the others were planters, ship-owners, merchants, grayed, with something of the dignity that perpetual weariness gives—and whatever their years, whether old or young, they had tired, sunken eyes, wore whites, and were drinking strong coffee or sour gin rickeys, for their queasy stomachs. They stood about, sitting on the corners of billard tables, or lying back in chairs, loafing on the seaward view of the veranda, sucking cigarets and discussing Oxenham. On the whole they took it as a rather bad joke, but a joke tempered with disapproval in the recurring phrase that—

"Oxey was always an ass."

One side of the veranda had a sea view, and here men watched impatiently to see Duclos' schooner, the *Emmeline*, come into the bay.

Rolland was greeted from all sides with haphazard good fellowship, and he shouted back eagerly, darting here and there to grip a hand or slap a shoulder.

They found a place in the dining-room. A tall, slim fellow with an indolent manner strolled up to the table:

"Word's just come in, Bobby, that the *Emmeline's* about two miles off the point. And Black McGree's going out. I'd have thought he would stay to see the fun."

"Black McGree here?" demanded Heddon, drawing his forehead into a heavy frown and looking from the indolent man to Rolland and back again.

"Sure. Been here a week. Not much of a friend of yours from the way you look," said Rolland.

Heddon got up and went to a window that had a view of the bay.

Rolland and the indolent man exchanged mystified glances from under lifted brows—

"Queer fellow, Bobby."

"That's Heddon, the fellow that made such a row in Washington—over a woman! Oxey's Heddon. He came in here with Bennings' daughter, looking for Sanborn. Bennings is dead. Queer ——, that Heddon. I asked him if the girl was good looking. Know what he said? He said, 'Don't know. Never looked at her.' Imagine!"

"Can't do it, Bobby. Can't do it," said the indolent man, and walked away.

From the window Heddon could see a toy-like brigantine far out on the bay. Black McGree was going out. Heddon tried to get a look at the *Gloria* but foliage cut off a view from where he stood. Having come in at night, he had not seen that McGree was in the bay. He wondered if McGree was leaving in a hurry because of the *Gloria's* being in. Perhaps, or perhaps not. There was no telling about McGree.

He came back to the table and sat down before a plate of bacon and eggs and a pot of coffee. He pushed the food aside and poured out the scalding coffee into his cup, then drank it, black and hot, while Rolland paused to stare, wondering how it was that he did not burn his throat.

"There—on your left, near the door, looking at you now," said Rolland, leaning half across the table. "That's Jeffries."

Heddon turned slowly and stared directly at Jeffries. Jeffries was easily above sixty, or more, dyspeptic, round-shouldered, in rumpled duck. He had rather long chin whiskers and a shaven upper-lip. His eyes were a dull, opaque gray, expressionless, more like shutters than windows; his mouth was partly open, as if half-grinning, and from habit half-adroop. He wore a black soft hat.

"What you think of him?" asked Rolland.

"That there's no hope for civilization as long as such as he are allowed to breed."

Heddon said it harshly, with meaning, but Bobby Rolland thought it a joke and swayed back in his chair, laughing noisily. He was rather exhilarated in gesture and voice. The tumbler-full of Scotch worked busily.

"But jokin' 'side, Lianfo's civilized. Savage South Seas—no such thing no more. Jus' look at men here. All civ'lized. Wear whites an' use forks. Gen'lemen."

"Civilized?" said Heddon. "You let a woman auction herself off, let her play —— with two men, and by marriage plan to rob a third—and you do nothing but sit around and bet on the outcome? You're as much tribal savages as any pack of headhunters."

"Say," Rolland observed judicially, "You're ver' queer too. Oxey's a funny one, but you—no 'fense, ol' man, but it mus' run in the fam'ly."

Men grinning in eagerness began hurrying into the kitchen and returning with pots and pans and ladles; they bunched together, laughing, rattling the pans. Old Jeffries, mouth adroop like a laughing dog, carried an iron kettle and a heavy soup ladle. One man tied a dish-pan around his own neck, and with the butt of a broken billiard-cue in one hand and a large tin cup in the other, beat on his pan to try it out. Another fellow had a wash-boiler, and jokingly tried to get the butt of the billiard-cue for a drum-stick. Others clashed empty sauce-pans together. Bobby Rolland, seeing what was on foot, left Heddon and hurried into the kitchen. Presently he returned with a string of freshly emptied tomato cans. Finding that those who had been before him had left nothing suitable for the charivari, he had got the cook to open nearly a dozen cans of tomatoes, which he tied on a string. He returned jubilantly to the veranda, clashing the cans, splattering traces of tomato on himself.

"We'll give ol' Oxey a reception he won't soon f'get, we will!" Rolland shouted.

Through the club there was the plop of corks. Champagne had begun to sizzle and hiss. A few handfuls of rice fell in a rattling shower, amid the protesting shouts of:

"Don't! Don't waste it!"

Natives gathered on the grass in the shade across from the club and looked on, grinning, interested, not understanding. Their bronze-dark faces were dotted with the whiteness of bared teeth; the black flower-studded hair of the women fell loosely down their shoulders.

Heddon, standing apart, shoulder against a pillar of the veranda, looked sullenly at the cheerful, good-natured, curious natives. Among them he recognized the sailors of the *Gloria*.

Bobby Rolland, consul, was bouncing about with a string of tomato cans in his hands, splattering tomato seeds and stain over the laundried whites of the men near him. Old Jeffries grinned vacantly and jiggled his iron kettle. The man with the wash-boiler pounded it with his fists, shouting:

"*Ump-a-ump, ump! Ump! Ump!*"

Three women with a lean old man who walked very erectly and stabbed the point of his cane, as if it were a third leg, rather more shriveled than the others, into the ground at every other step, came across the grass, approaching the club. They had dismounted from a two-seated gig that was left in the shade.

"Hello, Dwight!" voices called to him.

Hands waved to the women. Men ran forward to meet them.

"Just in time, everybody!"

"Get a pan and some rice, Dwight!"

Men went clattering down the steps toward the girls with old Dwight. Jeffries, his iron kettle flopping as if it was something tied to his wrist and forgotten, ran with a stiff-kneed jog-trot, meant to be spritely, and pushed himself inside the circle of younger men who, brandishing pans and laughing, encircled the women. Bobby Rolland teetered unsteadily before them, jiggling his tin cans, showing how much of a racket they would make.

Heddon, with head slightly lowered and eyes nearly closed, watched. He knew which was Peg Cardan before he heard her name spoken. Small, slender, golden, tremblingly alert and watchful, yet merry but with an air of poise, she looked at the men, listening to them, seeming somehow aloof from them, though the old doddering miser to whom she was selling herself stood against her arm. She was beautiful; intelligence played under the pearly luster of her complexion. Somehow she had the supreme aloofness of the blood royal, but carried the manner without hauteur; she seemed just a little tired, but her eyes sparkled, her gaze was direct; it was the men about her who were flustered, not she. Heddon felt a shock that was like a chill; she was that much like a woman he had known before, blonde, vivacious, poised and unscrupulously wise. Anger flared within him at the sheer injustice of beauty. For no reason at all some women had it, others were without it. It was like sorcery, an evil sorcery. This woman—he suddenly wished to see her cringing and in tears. It was because of her that Oxenham had been a mad fool.

There arose a louder babel, a stir and movement toward the seaward side of the veranda; voices in snatches of phrases said that the *Emmeline* was in, at anchor, that a boat was coming ashore; a half-dozen people were in it, one of them a woman.

"We'll give Oxey a send off!"

"Come on, ever'body!"

There was a renewed popping of corks, hasty last-minute drinks. Unsteady arms lifted slender glasses. Champagne fell splatteringly from the unsteady brims.

"To Oxey an' his bride!"

"Hurry!"

"Come on, ever'body!"

Pans and pots clattered; the man with the dish-pan tied to his neck beat a roll; the wash-boiler boomed; Bobby Rolland jiggled about, clattering his cans.

Men began straggling off toward the beach, thumping and banging, flinging rice sportively, calling for everybody to bunch up, all get together.

The grinning natives rose from the shade of the trees and, respectfully keeping to either side of the procession, accompanied it.

The women remained on the club veranda, and some of the older men.

Heddon passed by them, the last to go; he deliberately passed close to Peg Cardan, paused, and when she looked around, stared at her coolly from small feet to golden hair. He did not sneer, smile or frown; and having looked at her from the hair's tip to toe, as a bargainer might have looked at any piece of merchandise, he gazed more closely at her face for a moment and saw her move back slightly, half-shrinking. No man before had ever looked at her that way, and there was a bizarre fierceness about Heddon from his great size, his long, black hair, hard face and dark eyes that smoldered dangerously.

As he went on, Heddon overheard from behind him a double-chinned matron say:

"Well! I think if you ever meet him again he'll know you!"

"The impudence of him! For two cents—" And old Mr. Dwight vigorously thumped the veranda with the point of his cane.

"*Who* is he?" demanded Peggy Cardan.

"Why, my dear, Bobby Rolland says that is—" began the lady with the double-chin, pitching her voice to the resonant eagerness of one who tells black gossip with pleasure.

But Heddon heard nothing more.

Wateman, his back patiently propped against a palm, had been waiting for Heddon to come off the veranda. He had had something more to drink.

"What the billy ——'s in the wind, Will? I've rubbed me eyes a time or two a'ready. Has ever'body gone mad, 'r what? I seen some cannybals prance an' make bellyache sounds, beatin' gourds an' things. I never seen white men act the fool such-like afore. What's in the wind?"

"The Lianfo savages are celebrating."

"Is ever'body gone off their nut?"

"No, just a few that have looked on the face of a siren and heard her song. Ulysses sailed this way a couple of thousand years ago. Passed Lianfo. Bennings heard the same siren. Same voice. Same spirit. Changes bodies now and then. Takes a young one, soft, pearly-fleshed. You never heard a siren, Tom?"

Wateman frowned and blinked with upturned face; he pulled at an ear as if testing to see that it was sound, then looked backward toward the club veranda, from where a group of women gazed toward the beach.

"Is *she* one o' them? Bennings' girl?"

"Yes."

"Blast 'er!" said Wateman, with another backward glance, followed by a stumble as he moved ahead.

BOBBY ROLLAND, as a sort of self-appointed master of ceremonies, was futilely trying to line up his friends into a welcoming semicircle. The sand was deep and his legs were rather limber. His tongue had begun to give off the sound of "ish" with many of his words; and, half-clinging to this man or that, he would pat his friend affectionately, at the same time laboring to regain balance in the loose sand.

Beach-combers straggled in from their haunts to see the fun; a few Chinese merchants, expressionless, watchful, stood together; natives were scattered about, chattering, laughing.

Men impatiently clashed their pans, trying them out, like an orchestra tuning up.

The boat from the *Emmeline* was approaching. It was crowded. Those on shore began to yell and bang on their pans. Even the natives, who only vaguely understood what it was about, joined in the yelling. Before the boat grounded, men in blancoed shoes and starched duck ran knee-deep into the water and flung showers of rice. Natives willingly splashed out and ran the boat up on the smooth sand.

Everybody surged and splashed around the boat. Bobby Rolland whirled his tin cans in the air and struck a man, sending him reeling. Fellows with pans to clash tried to get them as close as possible to the ears of those in the boat. They yelled.

Duclos, slim, black, wiry, hopped from the boat with a flashing gesture and broad white smile. He was cheered noisily. They were in a mood to cheer anybody.

Sanderson, bulky as a barrel, stepped heavily from the boat, moving slowly. He pulled a time or two at the ends of his mustache, grinned, and in a slow deep voice said—

"They're married tight as if the Pope had done it."

Renewed cheering went up.

Oxenham and Ann sat side by side in the stern sheets. She looked about her with a sort of staring furtiveness, as if half-frightened yet dangerous. Taunts, hardly disguised as bad wit, went at her. It was as if she did not hear them.

In the broad sunlight she showed up more completely as the woman that she was; scrawny, sharp of feature, haggard, black-eyed. Her thin hair was askew, half-falling, and rice had lodged in her hair, lay on her shoulders, sprinkled her dress. Daubs of something that in the semidarkness of the *Gallows* gave her cheeks color showed in the morning light as thick splotches; but her lips were colorless, thin, tightly set. She was ugly, frightfully ugly and worn out; but something not unlike dignity was in her fierce-eyed silence. It was as if those long claw-like hands of hers would any instant scratch faces.

"Kiss him, Ann!"

"Congratulations, old girl!"

"Le's see you kiss him!"

"How's the bride, eh?"

"How's it feel to be married, Ann?"

"You got to kiss him 'fore you get out!"

Much else was said, less decent.

Oxenham, bareheaded, sat with arms on knees and head between his hands; from time to time he looked up imploringly, but there was no mercy. Lianfo was having its joke.

"Kiss 'er, Oxey. You gotta kiss her!"

He was a young fellow, tall, loosely built; his features were thin, as if illness had marked him, but they were clean, sensitive features, delicate. His deeply blue eyes were transparent, serious, sober, innocent—strangely out of place in a man's face. A feverish flush showed through the sunburn of his cheeks. The aching throb that follows drunkenness ran through his head; he was sick and sickened by the realization of what he had done. On board the *Emmeline*, more than half-dazed by an unaccustomed drunkenness, he had been held up by a man on either side to go through the ceremony, then was tossed into a bunk to sleep, while the others, excepting Ann, made merry over the joke. She had gone into the stateroom where he lay and locked the door, and would not come out when called to have her health toasted.

He had awakened with her ghastly face bending over him. Her breath had the odor of stale copra. She called him, "Dearie;" and when he struggled gropingly to get away from her, half-frightened by such a face, more frightened by her unwelcome tenderness, and demanded, "Who—who are you?" she told him; and his fuddled thoughts then called up to him a vague remembrance of the mad resolve he had made the night before when he staggered from his tormentors at the Lianfo Club.

Sickness and bewilderment enveloped him. The woman's black, hot, staring eyes seemed to have got inside his head. He could not shut them out. She stayed with him tenaciously, though he shouted at her: "Go away! Go away!" and beat at the caressing arm she put out.

"I will never leave you!" she said in a voice harsh with cigarets and whisky, shaking her scrawny head.

He knew nothing of women, as women; and this terrible insistence of the woman who had got her claws into the man gave him a frightful shock. He could not think.

"Go away! Go away!" he cried.

"I am your wife, dearie. I'll be good to you!"

And when he groaned she put a hard cold hand to his forehead and said—

"Don't you want a drink, sweetie?"

Protesting, but hardly resisting, he had then been taken from the stateroom and put into the boat beside the woman, Shanghai Ann, his wife, fastened to him—Sanderson's frequent words—"Tight as the Pope could have done it;" and now he was on the beach, surrounded by friends who jeered and clattered in the mockery of a welcome.

"Kiss her, Oxey!"

"You gotta kiss her!"

"Can't get out thish boat till you kish 'er!"

"Goonkiss'er!"

"Whoo-ee! Don't be bashful, Oxey!"

The pans clashed. Men crowded deep around the boat, wading heedlessly into the water at the stern, reaching out to push Oxenham's head against the face of Ann.

The tropic sun had melted the tallow-like veneer on the hide of the gentlemen of Lianfo; they jeered triumphantly, as if somehow vindicated because Oxenham, who had been more decent than any of them, had fallen lower than any of them ever could. In their hearts they meant him no malice. It was a charivari.

Duclos fastened his small hands in Oxenham's hair, shoving his head, bumping it against Ann's, and shouted gleefully—

"It is the kees—give her the kees, my frien'!"

Heddon could endure it no further. With shove and jerk and push that scattered men he forced his way to the boat. A back-handed blow took Duclos in the face and sent him sprawling, and when he fell, fumbling for the knife he had replaced in his sash on the *Emmeline*, Heddon kicked him—simply swung back his foot and drove it at him. Then Heddon turned, glowering at the men about the boat, and these became suddenly silent.

Duclos, with blood trickling from his mouth, rolled over in alert stealthiness, drew his knife, half-crouched. Wateman stamped on his wrist, grinding it with his heel, loosening the hold on the knife. Wateman picked it up, holding it by the blade as if about to use its butt for a club on Duclos' head; then, fiercely—

"Next time I have to take a bit o' steel from you, I'll put it in yer heart, ye dago!"

With an upward heave, he sent it in a glittering whirl over the water. It flashed with a tiny splash at the surface and sank. Instantly native children were scrambling with frantic splashing to get the treasure.

"Now lishen, Hedd'n, ol' man," said Bobby Rolland, half-supporting himself by laying hold of Heddon's arm, "we're all Oxshy's frien's—ever'thing's aw right—I'll shee 'at ever'thing's aw——"

Heddon gave an impatient jerk of arm and Rolland sat down, clattering among his tin cans, landing bolt upright, staring owlishly.

"He hit Bobby!"

"Big bully!"

"Struck the American consul!"

"Why don't you pick on somebody your size!" a man back and well beyond reach cried.

Old Wateman shouted at the fellow:

"I'm yer size, —— ye, whoever ye are. I'll pick on ye! Jus' step out here!"

"Struck the American consul!" a beachcomber bawled hopefully.

"He hit you, Bobby. Hit you!"

"Thash nothin'—nothin'," said Rolland, being helped to his unsteady feet and looking at Heddon with unoffended gaze, almost admiringly. "Thash nothin' for him. He's man 'at shlapped Lord Kelso's face—Wash'ton."

Heddon had put a hand under Oxenham's shoulder:

"Come on, Fred. Come with me."

Oxenham looked around wearily, looked at Heddon with a sort of blank stare. He was too dulled for even surprize. He knew it was Heddon, but the world had gone topsy-turvy. Anything might happen. His nerves were exhausted, could not react to anything. At the moment about all he realized was that one friendly hand and voice had reached him. He was deathly sick from pain and nausea, and a more painful sense of wreckage. Overnight, the world had broken into pieces and been most horribly repatterned. Now he stared at Heddon, knowing him, but hardly wondering how or why he came to be there.

Oxenham totteringly stepped from the boat and leaned heavily as a wounded man against Heddon's arm. Once he looked up, staring in a sad, unreproachful puzzled daze at the men about him, most of whom he knew by their first names. Some had now thrown aside their pots and pans. The natives unobtrusively reached in between legs and began picking them up for their own cooking-fires. Oxenham dropped his head and would not look up again.

"Out of the way!" said Heddon, drawing

his hand across his breast as if to make way with a back-handed sweep of arm.

He was in a mood to crack heads, anybody's head.

"Out o' the way!" Wateman repeated savagely, and gave Jeffries a shove that sent him struggling clumsily to keep his balance.

He still held the iron kettle and ladle, and did not let go of either. It was as if instinctive thrift would not let him discard anything that he got his hands on.

Ann climbed out of the boat. No one spoke to her now. She had on a black skirt, and the red stockings with holes in them showed as she climbed out. The rice that had sifted into her thin oiled hair looked like big lice. She made a quick short hobbling rush and got beside Oxenham, taking his arm, limping herself, trying to help him. Every one who saw grinned; some laughed. Heddon was on the other side of Oxenham. Wateman picked up the butt of the billiard-cue and glared challengingly from side to side as he followed.

"Where do you want to go?" asked Heddon.

"Home—I suppose. I'm living at the Bennett house. I don't care where."

People were lined on the club veranda, looking toward the beach, watching, some with binoculars. Even at a distance grins showed on the faces there. They were too far off to see the utter wretchedness in Oxenham's manner; but they could see the lean beach woman, hobbling along, holding on affectionately, and this was amusing—at a distance.

Oxenham did not notice anything. He walked along weakly, with head down. Heddon guided the way right up by the Club and cut across the grass in passing the veranda. He looked steadily up into the faces of those who were there. His gaze searched for Peggy Cardan, but she had withdrawn. No one spoke.

Heddon had come across close by the club to make directly for old Mr. Dwight's gig; and went to it, helped Oxenham into the front seat, then turned on Ann—

"You need not come."

She glared back, standing rigidly:

"I am comin'. Where he goes, I go. *You* or no man can keep me from it!"

"Go on off somewhere. You'll get money out of him, plenty if you leave him alone."

"I won't go. I don't want his old money. I want him. He's my husband—you've no right——"

Heddon was staring at her in such a way that she drew back a little, afraid that he would strike her; but she held her ground stubbornly.

"You've got to kill me to keep me from comin'. I'm goin' where he goes—I am—I am!"

Oxenham muttered:

"Let her come, Will. We've got to have it over with—understanding. Sooner the better. Let her come, Will."

Ann began to climb into the front seat beside him, but Heddon caught her arm—

"Get up behind there."

Heddon untied the horse from the post and was turning to get into the gig when old Mr. Dwight, running from the club, shouted at him, waving his cane.

"Of all the thundering impudence!" said Mr. Dwight, stormily and puffing as he stopped before Heddon. "Get out of my carriage!"

"I'm borrowing it," said Heddon.

"Who the —— told you you could borrow it!" shouted Mr. Dwight as he vigorously stabbed the turf with the point of his cane and shook an accusing finger at Heddon. "Who told you you could borrow it?"

"No one," said Heddon.

"I won't have that woman in my carriage. Get out, you! Get out! It's my carriage!"

"Stay where you are," said Heddon to the woman; then to the outraged Mr. Dwight: "No better than she used it this morning. You'll get your carriage back, all in good condition. Good day, sir."

With that Heddon stepped into the gig, picked up the reins, took the whip and sharply struck the horse. Wateman just barely did manage to scramble up on the back seat as they drove off, leaving the elderly Mr. Dwight punching the turf with his cane and swearing.

VIII

THE Bennett house was a mile or more from the town and sat well back in large grounds some distance off from any other residence. A winding, well-kept roadway went by, leading up to the Dwights, a half-mile farther on. Between the house and the bay was quite a stretch of jungle verdure, through which bridle trails had been cut.

The people of Lianfo had money and were pleased to believe that they had created an air of social aristocracy in their remote colony.

Heddon turned into the driveway. The entrance was ornamented by columns of coral rock. In the deeply graveled drive the wheels gave off a grinding scrunch; and the rattling *chomp-chomp-chomp* of the horse's jogging feet sounded harsh and melancholy in the stillness of the grounds. The air was still and heavy with the fragrance of orange-blossoms.

The gig stopped before the veranda steps and Wateman got down, standing with hands to hips, looking curiously about. Tropic silence brooded over the grounds. There were no birds, not an insect, not a voice—no sound but the stamp of the horse's feet, and from far off the dull vague surge of surf.

Heddon wrapped the reins round the whip-stock and got down. Oxenham, with a hesitation like feebleness, descended gropingly. Ann did not stir until she saw him start, then she climbed down, missing the step, landing on her crippled foot, nearly falling. No one looked toward her.

They went on the veranda. Heddon pushed open a door with a movement as if breaking through. The room was dim. After being in the sunlight it seemed to their eyes almost as dark as night. The house, designed to keep out sunlight and heat, was dark and dim throughout. At Lianfo people lived mostly on verandas.

The Bennetts had money. Lots of money and bad taste. The room was very large and cluttered with stuff. The bad taste of the Bennetts had been compounded in their having things sent out from the States by ordering from catalogs.

The room was full of queer stuff. An oaken what-not was wedged into one corner; plumes of dried pampas-grass flared like ghosts about to materialize from out the mouth of a large, blue vase that sat in another corner. On a large table in the center of the room was a big casket covered with shells and seed pearls, and the family album, bulky, fat, lay beside it. One of the carpets in the room was a Brussels, red, with spots where moths had fed. On one side of the table was a horse-hair couch, black and stiff as a tightly stuffed hide; on the other side was a ponderous davenport, with holes that cigarets had burned.

Oxenham sank wearily into a chair. On the previous afternoon he had been sitting there, trying to outface his lonely depression by smoking and reading. His pipe lay as he had left it on the ash-tray beside the chair; the open book, spread face down, lay on the table just as he had placed it when he restlessly decided to go down to the Club. On a little stand beside the chair was a tray with fresh uncut limes, a knife, an unopened bottle of soda-water.

He sank back in the chair and closed his eyes, dizzily groping with his thoughts. It was like a dream, a feverish nightmare—everything between the hour he had left the chair and returned to it. A flicker of seconds passed. He opened his eyes in the startled hopefulness that it *was* all a dream; then he groaned slightly and his head fell forward against his upraised hands.

Ann hobbled to him, thrusting out a hand, asking:

"What is it, dearie? Can I do something for you?"

Heddon jerked her back, pushing her aside:

"None of that. Leave him alone. Get away."

She took a lame step backward, then stood grotesquely awry, shoulders at a slant and glared With a circling gesture half-around her head, she swept the loose, skimpy hair from before her face She looked a half-starved hag, fierce-eyed from hunger.

Heddon observed her in disgust. Oxenham must be rid of her.

"How much do you want to clear out?"

"I won't take money! I won't go! I'll be good to him—you think I'm a bad woman, but I'm not. I'll show you!"

"See here. You'll not get a cent, and'll get thrown out, too, if you keep up that talk. You know —— well that he is not going to have you around, anywhere near him. You knew that he was drunk. Knew it was a beastly joke. If you had a glimmer of decency you wouldn't have gone through with it! Get out!"

Heddon towered over her, his face ablaze with anger. She had been struck by men who looked less threatening. She expected now to be struck. His long fingers were clenched.

"You can kill me," she cried shrilly. "You can kill me but——"

"Oh, who the —— wants to kill you! You've got to get out of here, that's all. Off the island too. A hundred dollars and not another —— cent. That's all you get. A good night's work for you. What'd you say?"

"No! No!" she cried, her face distorted as if she were about to break into tears, shaking her head at each word. "No!"

"Not enough, eh? It's all you'll get at most. What are you trying to put over, anyhow?"

He regarded her with half-puzzled contempt, watching a little curiously the expressions on her face. She seemed rapidly trying on one mask after another as if seeking the one that would be most suitable. Shades of defiant anger changed to the twitching of grief, and back again. One instant she looked as if trying to reach his sympathy by hopeless sadness; the next her thin hard face would set fiercely, as if she were ready to fly at him.

"I know what I am——"

Her voice was humble and begging, and two moist spots appeared at the inner corners of her eyes and began to trickle down her nose.

"I know—but I never had a chanct. Don't make me go back to the beach. Anything but that—I'll do anything, but don't make me go back. I'll be his slave——"

"Aw, stop it!"

"He's not like other men. I didn't hardly know what I was doing last night—hones'! I don't want money. Hones' I don't. Don't send me back to the beach. I don't want money——"

"No, you merely want a good home with more than you can eat and drink, and keep your claws in some man's flesh. That's all any woman wants."

"A man got me when I was twelve years ol' and put me in a 'Frisco dance hall. A man took me from there to Shanghai. A man kicked me down stairs an' broke my leg so I've been like this—" she straightened up, then let herself sink down on the shortened leg—"ever since. A man what promised to be good to me took me on his ship an' beat me 'most ever' night, and when he got sick I nursed him, an' when he got well he nearly killed me—said I tried to poison him. I went on the beach at Apia an' a man cut me up 'cause I wouldn't help him rob the Chinaman I was workin' for."

She tore open her waist and disclosed the long scar of a knife's edge.

"I come to Lianfo an' Duclos would have killed me if I hadn't done what he wanted last night. It's always been some man. I never had a chanct. I thought last night I'd even up—I didn't know he was like he is, jes' a kid. I do want a home an' many times I ain't had enough to eat. I want to go straight. I'll work. I'll be a servant. I'll do anything to get away from that beach. I ain't thirty yet, an' look at me! Mister, please let me have a chanct. It ain't that I want to be his wife—I know that can't be, but I'm sorry for him, an' I'll slave for him. Please don't send me back to the beach—don't—Duclos'll kill me—I'm no good, but I'm not a bad woman. Please give me a chanct—please!"

She leaned forward breathlessly, her hand theatrically extended, pleadingly:

"Don't send me to the beach. Give me a chanct, jus' a chanct!"

"One hundred dollars—or nothing. In either case, out you go and now!"

"No! No! I won't take money!"

"Then you go without it!"

He swung his arm; she screamed and nearly fell in her effort to dodge; but his fingers fastened on her shoulder, and he jerked her around, starting for the door.

"Tom," said Heddon, "I'll throw her in the gig. You drive her down to the beach."

She screamed as if being murdered, struggling, grasping at anything, pulling, kicking. Her waist ripped under Heddon's grip, tore loose, and in a flash she scrambled back and began hobbling wildly across the room, crying:

"Oh, God help me! Oh, God help me!"

Wateman swore in surprize.

Heddon flung the rags that had come away in his hand to the floor, kicked out of his way a chair she had overturned and grimly looked toward her.

She stood against the far wall, sagging on her crippled leg; her skimpy hair was all down; her shoulder naked; her eyes blazed with fright. She was terrified, not by fear that Heddon would hurt her, but at being thrown back on the beach. She was crazily determined not to go. Nothing else that could happen to her, she felt would be as bad as that. It was as if she had slipped into heaven by mistake and was about to be hurled out over the star-studded parapet.

"It's a beastly scene we are making of it," said Heddon grimly, "but out you go."

He started for her. She screamed. Oxenham stood up weakly, his hand pawing at Heddon's arm:

"Don't! I can't stand it. Let her alone, now."

He brushed his forehead with the back of his hand as if trying to lift shadows from before his eyes, and in a half-confused tone he continued—

"I don't know what to do—what to say—we can't, can't mistreat her just because—you know, it wouldn't be right."

"You want her to stay here, with you?" Heddon demanded angrily.

"But no—no, of course not. But she—after such a life, somebody ought to help her some how, you know."

"She was lying."

"I wasn't!" Ann screamed. "I swear I wasn't! It was all true—every——"

"Shut up, you!" Wateman shouted at her, brandishing his billiard-cue.

"Just as men, just as decent men," said Oxenham dully, "we have to do something for her—or any woman that wants to get away from that sort of life."

He looked up wearily. His blue eyes were feverish and tired, filled with a hurt look, but their clear preposterous innocence was not yet effaced. He was rather thin, had always been of the weakling type, physically, though there was a preoccupied earnestness about him that of itself was very like strength.

"Just what do you suggest?" Heddon asked scornfully.

"I don't know—don't know. Every man has to work out everything for himself," said Oxenham with a kind of weary glibness.

"Yes, and working yourself out of the Cardan affair you got into this mess. If you want her, you can have her. She's your wife."

"Oh! My God, no!"

"Then shall I send her back with Tom?"

"Wait—wait, not now," said Oxenham, pressing his slender hand to his forehead and looking with distressed mystification toward her.

"Tom, take the gig back to town. And you—" to the woman—"get out. I don't care where, but get out, out of the room. We want to be alone. But I'll tell you now that you're going back on the beach, where you belong."

Wateman went out of the front door. Ann, with a sort of stealthy, sidling movement, edged along the wall and backed through an inner door, watching Heddon.

"Anything in the house she can carry off?"

"No, and she wouldn't do that, Will. How do you happen to be here on Lianfo? What a time to come in on me! I'm so thirsty my mouth seems stuck together."

He opened the bottle of warm soda-water that had stood on the tray all night. His hands shook. He squeezed a lime into the glass, poured in the soda-water and gulped it down.

"Will—" his voice was hopeless—"I'm done for. Everybody must be terribly shocked. I don't know what got into me!"

"Champagne."

"My God, I am not really married to her?"

"You are, yes. At least so much so that you'll have to get some kind of legal action to clear yourself."

OUTSIDE were native voices. The servants were returning from the beach. Wateman's waspish tones were audible too. He had turned the carriage over to some native and sent him to town.

Oxenham sat down, fumblingly replaced the glass on the table. It tipped over, fell to the floor and broke. He did not notice, but pressed his hands to his face. His thin form seemed shaken with noiseless sobs.

"My God, what shall I do? My mother—father! The girls—Will, my two sisters, they were coming out this Fall! To see my wife! I took this house for my wife!"

"I'm sailing in the morning. Chuck everything—come with me."

"I can't do that. There must be the right thing to do, if I can only hit on it. There's always the right——"

"Oh ——," said Heddon, disgusted, dropping into a chair. "Stop that rot. You don't know when you are well off."

Oxenham looked at him with dazed blankness, and repeated dully—

"Well off?"

"Yes, sure. You might have married the other one—that Cardan woman. It would have cost you more than a hundred dollars to be rid of her. When she had run off with some other man, you'd have got drunk and probably killed both of them—then been hanged."

Oxenham looked toward him, then away, back again, then away, repeating the glance many times; at last asking—

"Of what are you talking?"

"Of Margaret Cardan, of San Francisco."

"But you don't know her!"

"The —— I don't. One look at Jeffries is enough. I know the heart and soul of any woman that would marry a thing like that."

"That's just what knocked me out, Will. I didn't blame her, not a bit, for feeling that I wasn't good enough for her. It was all right to break the engagement with me. But then she announced her engagement to him—why, he's a mean vicious lewd old man. *Everybody* knows it. This woman here—" he moved his hand toward the inner doorway— "is even too good for *him!* And what in heaven's name am I going to do with her? I don't know what's the right thing——"

Heddon, with jeering bitterness, said—

"You go blundering about, looking for that 'right thing,' and you'll end up in another mess, worse I tell you."

"What could be worse?"

"Not letting me pitch her back on the beach."

"But she said she wouldn't go, and you saw how she acted. No, there must be some other way. Besides, she won't go—you can see it in her face. I know she won't."

"A lot you know about women. What's to stop her from going if I take her? And that's just what I'm going to do; unless, of course, you want her with you."

"Don't say that. She ought to be helped. I never want to see her again or hear of her. But I'll feel better if I can help her somehow."

"You are the ——est fool I ever saw, and always were," said Heddon. "What on earth could you do to help a woman like that? Put her in this house, and inside of a week she'd either be sneaking back down on the beach o' nights, or having beachcombers and nigger sailors up here. It's in her blood. Of course her life is hell, and perhaps she does hate it—but she couldn't break away from it any more than a hophead could leave his pipe. Besides, you try to help her and she'll have her claws in you as long as she lives. The only way to get rid of her is to kick her out. You're tender-hearted, soft, and she knows it, and all she's after is what she can get out of you!"

The inner door opened slightly, then was pushed wide and swung back against the wall. Shanghai Ann had been listening, had overheard at least what Heddon had just been saying. She held one hand behind her and limped in quickly, rising and sinking with each step, head up, eyes set in a bright fixed stare.

"You are not going to put me back on the beach!" she cried. "I'll show you what I can do when I don't want to go! I've got this an'——"

The hand swung from behind her. It held a big army revolver she had seen hanging in a holster in the hall. The hammer was cocked.

"—an' I'll kill myself!"

She turned the muzzle up, pointing at her forehead, and stared wildly from one man to the other.

Oxenham sprang up tremblingly:

"Don't! My God, don't! Put it down!"

"I'll kill myself!"

"Don't, woman! Don't—don't do it!"

"She won't," said Heddon, contemptuously reassuring.

"I won't, won't I?" Ann screamed.

"No."

"I'll show you—I'll show both you—I'll kill myself!"

"All right," said Heddon, at the same time laying hold of Oxenham who trembled in readiness to rush forward. "All right, if you like. Nobody's stopping you."

"I believe you want me to!" she screamed. "You want to be rid of me! I'll do it—I'll kill myself!"

"It isn't loaded?" said Oxenham doubtfully, almost to himself, trying to remember.

"It is loaded. It is! You'll see—I'll just show you!" and she pressed the muzzle against her temple.

"Put it down! Put it *down!*" Oxenham begged, pulling to get away from the hand on his arm. "Don't do that—I can't stand it! That's a hair-trigger—put it down!"

"Aw tell her to go on and do it—then she'll drop the gun quick enough," said Heddon coldly, releasing his hold on Oxenham. "I'm going out on the veranda until her little scene is over. Shoot yourself if you want to!"

Heddon, rolling a cigaret as he went, and not once looking back, went to the door and stood in it with his back to the room.

Ann's arm shook so much that she was pressing the muzzle tightly against the side of her head to keep the gun from wobbling. Her dark eyes were stretched wide, with a wildly excited look in them. But even Oxenham now half-doubted her threat; still he was not sure, and he hovered forward on the balls of his feet as if about to jump for the gun.

"I might as well be dead—nobody cares what happens to me!" she cried in angry self-pity. "I've never had a chanct. Men beat an' kicked me from the day I was born! An' I'm not goin' back on the beach. I'm not! I'll kill myself first—I'll——"

"Don't! Put it down! You'll be taken care of—I promise—give me the gun—it's a hair trig——"

He made a quick step forward, reaching out. She lurched backward to keep beyond his reach, and was half-falling when the gun went off.

IX

OUT on the veranda Oxenham collapsed in a long bamboo chair much as if he too had been shot; though, at that, worse than a bullet was the matter with him, and he reeled dizzily in trying to sit up, but he would not lie down.

He was too knocked out, really, to feel much of anything; he had never before this day, or at least before Peg Cardan had tossed him to the skies and let him fall, had a real jar. He was the petted son of a wealthy, devoted family, and only because he had the sort of stuff in him—it was rather out of place in being in him—that wanted to go out and get ahead for himself, that he had come bungling into plantation development, lured to it by the tropic glamour.

Heddon, sitting on the veranda rail, rolled a cigaret in idle deliberation as if not paying much attention to anything else in the world.

They were waiting for the resident magistrate to come out from town. A native had been sent to him with a message.

"I thought that gun was empty. I thought it was empty."

"She thought so too," said Heddon, feeling about his pockets for a match.

He found a match, struck it, lighted the cigaret.

"That was the worst thing that could have happened, Will. The very worst thing!"

Heddon shook out the flame of the match, spun it away, idly watching it fall; then, inhaling deeply:

"For once you are right. She made tragedy out of farce."

Judge Davies dismounted ponderously from the carriage and with a slow waddling heave came up the steps. The driveway was filling with carriages out of which men scrambled hastily, hurrying that they might miss nothing. They came upon the veranda with trampling eagerness.

Bobby Rolland, who had got into fresh clothes, and with a slightly sobering effect had been swallowing lemon-sours, was among the first to arrive. His round face was very flushed and his eyes were still a bit owlish. Old Jeffries, of course, was in the crowd; and old Mr. Dwight, who talked in a high-pitched voice and thumped with the point of his cane.

Routine life on the island was excessively dull, and whatever happened out of the ordinary gave the jaded residents a pleasurable excitement.

Judge Davies had been out in the islands a long time. He had made a lot of money. He knew all the wrinkles of island affairs. There was a good deal of cunning under his phlegmatic heaviness, and he was a bully. But so far as anybody knew or suspected, he was honest, except that a prejudice one way or another set him hard and fast, and at times he was inclined to be very high-handed. He would never admit having made a mistake or having changed his mind. New facts, he would explain with judicial severity, had been brought to his attention. If crossed he would puff and swell explosively.

He was much too fat to be at ease in the tropics, yet he never thought of leaving the island. His eyes were large, pop-eyed, and he had a way of staring severely. He was perpetually short of breath, and always clipped the "ng" off words, as if the sound was a waste of effort; when he talked it was a sort of propulsive grunting; laboriously forcing out the words.

"What's goin' on here?" he demanded, stopping heavily before Oxenham, who, with an air of partly relieved eagerness, had come forward to meet him. "That boy of yours said somebody killed the woman. Bad business, you mixin' up with that woman. How'd it happen? Who shot 'er?"

"She shot herself," Heddon answered slowly from the veranda rail, giving the magistrate a long, searching look.

"Why, yes, yes!" said Oxenham a little confused.

He wiped his face with his forearm, then spoke hurriedly:

"You don't understand. She shot herself."

"Unh?" Judge Davies grunted doubtfully, drawing a cigar from his pocket and holding it half-way to his mouth as he glared with pop-eyed steadiness. "Unh? —— considerate of her, I'd say offhand. That boy you sent—I questioned him."

Judge Davies nodded slightly, as if merely giving a little insight into his deep shrewdness.

"Said somebody shot 'er. Said he heard quarrelin'!"

Oxenham bit his lip, half-raised clenched hands as if in a spasm of pain, and grew white:

"My God, you don't think—you can't—My God, you—you——"

His voice broke. He stood as if stupefied.

There was a low, excited buzz of voices over the veranda; then, abruptly, a hush. No one had suspected such a thing; not one had thought of it but Judge Davies. Deep man, the magistrate.

"I say she shot herself!" said Heddon, rising, frowning darkly.

"Hump," said Judge Davies, taring with wide-eyed severity. Heddon met his gaze with a look that glittered. "You swear to that will you?"

"Yes."

"You saw her do it?"

"I didn't exactly see——"

Heddon broke the sentence, but it was too late. If he had thought he would have sworn that he did see.

"Unh-un," said Judge Davies, complacently, nodding his heavy head.

"Why—why I didn't think it was loaded!" Oxenham gasped. "And I tried to stop her—I—I— That's what made her do it—I tried to get it from her, and—and it went off!"

"Un-hunh," said Judge Davies, rising on his toes, stabbing a corner of his mouth with the unlighted cigar, settling back on his heels, and all the while bearing down on Oxenham with that pop-eyed glare. Then, carefully stressing the important words—

"Why did you try to stop her if you didn't think it was loaded?"

"Why—why—don't you see, I wasn't sure—I— Oh, you don't think I did it?" he begged, his thin, haggard face drawn into the distortion of anguish.

The men on the veranda, the sight-seers, began to exchange shocked significant glances, as much as to say:

"Why, of course! And we never thought of that!"

They looked toward him with renewed, morbidly keen interest. To them his very dejection, the broken-down trembling of his thin body, was confessional.

"Look here," said Heddon, taking a step forward, pushing men out of the way, coming between Oxenham and Davies, "any idiot can see what you're driving at. But the fact of the matter is just as he says. I was there. I didn't actually see the gun go off—I don't think she meant to do it. She was trying to get his sympathy and the gun went off!"

"Um-hunh?" Judge Davies replied, with a strong rising inflection, as if the more confirmed in his suspicions, looking Heddon up and down. "The gun went off, eh? Accidentally. Um-hunh? When *he* had ever' reason for wishin' she was dead!"

Oxenham caught at the magistrate's arm, pleading:

"You don't believe—not that! Oh, my God, no!"

"Young man," said Judge Davies sternly, "your story don't hold together right. Where's the body?"

He looked about as if it might be somewhere near by on the veranda.

"In there," Heddon answered, pointing. "And no matter what you think of his story, it's the truth."

"You're his frien', ain't you?" demanded Judge Davies.

"I am. And if she was murdered, I did it. I told her to go ahead and shoot!" said Heddon, looking down with an expression of angry contempt upon the magistrate's heavily jowled face.

"He'd do it, too, that fellow!" Bobby Rolland muttered half-admiringly.

"But she didn't do it, when you tol' her?" said Judge Davies.

"No, and she didn't intend to. She was trying to scare this boy into—I don't know what she did want. I told her she could have a hundred dollars and not another —— cent. That in any case she'd have to clear out. That I would throw her out. And I would have!"

A hush followed, with faces turned expectantly on Judge Davies, who bit a piece from his cigar and spit it out, but kept his eyes on Heddon; then, slowly the magistrate repeated:

"You're his frien', ain't you? 'Sides,

you admit you didn't see who shot 'er."

They went into the room, the large living-room of the fashionable Bennetts.

People were still coming into the grounds, hurrying with an air of excited anxiousness, questioning those already present. Only men came. Their women folk gathered on the cool sides of verandas, talking excitedly, waiting impatiently to hear details.

Heddon clamped a hand on Bobby Rolland's shoulder, turning him about:

"You, as American consul, what are *you* going to do about this? Oxenham didn't do it—you know it!"

"Why—er—I'll do what I can. I'll take the matter up with——"

"What's that? What's that?" said Judge Davies, staring wrathfully. "Seein' justice done on this island is my work, young fellow. You tend to your business an' I'll tend to mine. I helped get your appointment an' I can help them as want to take it away from you!"

Under his hand Heddon felt Rolland's body relax weakly and Heddon shoved him aside.

Within the room the crowd clustered in a neck-craning circle round the sprawling form of the dead woman. Judge Davies chewed his unlighted cigar and looked down for a long time; then—

"That gun there—hand me that gun, one o' you fellows."

Judge Davies was too fat to stoop easily.

Two or three hands reached together as if about to scramble for it. The gun lay just beyond her fingers. Blood had spread to it. There was blood on the handle.

"Wipe it off," said the judge, drawing back his hand.

The man took a handkerchief from his pocket, wiped the gun, and gave it to the judge, then, wadding his handkerchief, threw it to the floor.

"Her clothes are torn!" said some one in an eager voice.

"Yes, see! Clear off her!"

Eyes swung morbidly toward Oxenham.

"Hump," said Judge Davies, pausing in his examination of the gun to look closely at the naked shoulders. "Did she do that by accident, too?" he asked, glaring toward Heddon. "An' this gun, it's yours, ain't it, Oxenham? An' there's only one shell in it? How'd that happen? Hunh?"

"I don't know!" said Oxenham imploringly. "I cleaned it last week. I emptied it. I never keep it loaded. There was a belt of shells on the holster——"

"Hunh," Judge Davies grunted doubtfully. "You're tellin' a queer story, Oxenham. You, too!" He glared at Heddon.

Somebody returned from the hallway bearing the holster and cartridge-belt. The fellow had his finger pointing importantly at a row of shells from which one was missing, and he held up the belt for all to see, just as if what he had to show meant anything.

"I don't see why she'd kill herself—" Judge Davies was now speaking to those about him—"she was a bad one, an' I'm not sayin' it was any great loss. But she wouldn't have killed herself. Them kind don't. Besides, she had you in a fix, Oxenham. Just where she wanted you. Could get money out o' you. She had the gun, y' say. You tried to get it, y' say. Looks to me like somebody pointed it right where they wanted it to be sure an' kill her—an' even your frien' there, he says she didn't mean to kill herself. Of course she didn't!"

"Are you trying this case—now?" asked Heddon angrily.

"I'm puttin' facts together, young man. I'm examinin' into the matter," Judge Davies answered, swelling a little. "An' you haven't helped the case any by sayin' she didn't mean to kill herself when it shows the gun was right up against her head. So if *she* didn't mean to kill herself, somebody must have put it there. An' the boy you sent to tell me, he *saw!*"

Oxenham, after a moment's daze, as if hit by a club, looked about wildly, staggered, reached out, and was caught by men at each side of him. He had fainted.

"Get away!" Heddon shouted, pushing them aside and taking the body in his arms. "Out of the way!" he repeated savagely, moving toward the tightly stuffed, black horse-hair couch. "Keep back, —— you—all of you. Get water and keep back, out of the way! Here's the only man on your blasted island that absolutely couldn't do anything wrong—except when you —— rotters got him drunk and sent him off down the beach to end up in this mess. Clear out of here!"

Judge Davies became more swollen, and, with hand upraised—

"I hereby place in custody Fred Oxenham, held for murder of his wife, known as Shanghai Ann!"

JUDGE DAVIES found before the afternoon was over that the residents were not pleased by Oxenham's having been placed under arrest; and before he was out of the house he began overhearing unfavorable comments. Some of his financial equals expressed themselves directly. But he had made up his mind and blustered vigorously, the more so as he realized that he might have been a little hasty in forming conclusions.

The native boy who brought him word of the dead woman had, under the magistrate's questioning, rapidly improved on his own story when he saw how important it was. He had, he said, heard quarreling and listened. He had, he said, heard the woman begging. She was much afraid. Then there had been the shot. When he came in, Oxenham was standing over her. The gun—he said, finally, after neglecting to mention this fact at first—was in Oxenham's hand.

But during the afternoon at the club, where the residents hunted the shade and had warm champagne served, Judge Davies had to argue with friends who pointed out that natives were notorious liars; that this one had first said the gun was on the floor before saying that he saw Oxenham drop it; that Oxenham was not at all the sort of man who would kill anybody—that if any one shot her, more likely it was that fellow Heddon; besides, it was the best thing that could have happened anyhow, no matter how it happened.

Judge Davies chewed a fresh unlighted cigar and answered stubbornly, puffing out his cheeks explosively; but men who had known him intimately for twenty years could not be silenced by his anger, particularly when they rather enjoyed making him puff and bluster.

His friends maliciously began to talk of how influential were Oxenham's people. Lianfo was one of a rich group under a sort of international commission and the Oxenhams said people who knew nothing about it—knew all the Washington diplomats and would probably try to have Judge Davies removed. The magistrate's friends could not resist the perverse pleasure of seeing him squirm; besides, they did feel sorry for Oxenham.

They had at first got a hectic exhilaration out of seeing Oxenham—he was such an odd ass—the butt of jokes and fate; then, in the reaction after his tragedy, they abruptly remembered that, though preposterous, he was a decent, honest, kindly boy, who was getting far too much the worst of it.

IT WAS the middle of the afternoon. In the Bennett living-room Oxenham, one hand pressed tightly against his forehead, huddled forward in a chair as if about to drop face down to the floor; in the other he held a glass of water into which Heddon had squeezed a lime that gave a cooling acid flavor to the insipidly warm water.

Heddon sat on a corner of the table and scowled sullenly at the doorway. Under his frown the dark eyes seemed to settle deeper into their sockets and grow brighter. His thick black hair hung loosely in a shaggy tangle. He looked dangerous. A cigaret burned unnoticed with a wisp of bluish smoke between his long fingers as he stared angrily toward first one doorway, then another.

They were alone in the room, but at each doorway stood a native wearing a sort of uniform—straw hat, loose blouse and trousers, with feet bare and a club dangling at the wrist.

Judge Davies had a lot of pride in the native police. They had been organized by him, years before. Out on the veranda others of the native police loafed indolently, squatting on their haunches, sprawling in the chairs.

The only thing that resembled a jail in Lianfo was a filthy hut into which drunken beach-combers were dragged if they came roistering into the market place, scattering the fruit, pawing at the girls. Oxenham was placed under guard in his home.

Heddon had told the magistrate:

"He is my cousin. I'll stay with him. Put me under arrest, too, if you like. I had more to do with her death than he, anyhow!"

"No," Judge Davies said slowly, with a sort of obstinate suspicion, as if wary lest Heddon, somehow, might get the better of him. "No, you ain't had nothin' to do with her death or you wouldn't talk that way, young fellow. You can stay with him till sundown if you want, but he's goin' to be kept under guard ever' minute."

"I can't stand it, Will," Oxenham now groaned. "I can't stand it! I would rather die. I wish I were dead!"

"So do I," said Heddon, "if you are going to funk. Here, read some more of this!"

Heddon pushed toward him the book which Oxenham had left off reading the night before when he went to the club and began to drink warm champagne. The book fell unheeded from the table. The title was "Golden Thoughts."

"My mother—this will kill my mother—my sisters are coming out to meet my wife! My father! Will, what can I do?"

"You can talk French, then these niggers won't be repeating everything you say. And don't worry what that short-eared donkey of a Davies does. Your family can get you out."

Oxenham shook his head:

"It isn't getting out—it's having been accused! It's having them find out everything. I was married to that awful woman, Will!"

"Yes, you've gone smash. But I can get you out of here—off the island—" he was speaking in French—"but it will be practically the same thing as pleading guilty. You'll be running away."

"I'll never do that. No, not that."

"I could get some of these natives drunk, then tonight get you on the *Gloria* and take her out."

"No, no." Then after a pause of staring thoughtfulness, again: "No. I won't run away. I won't run. When this case is over I'll leave. I won't run."

Presently there was the scrape of rapid feet on the veranda. The babbling of the native police, loafing there, stopped. Wateman's harsh voice shouted eagerly:

"Git off here—git, you smoked-up monkeys! Git out—I'll throw you out!"

Heddon had thought him senselessly drunk somewhere, and, jumping forward, crowded the brown policeman out of the doorway and saw old Wateman brandishing his fists, and swearing, in the faces of the startled natives, who looked questioningly from him to a young man in a white pith helmet coming up the veranda steps.

"It's all right, Will!" yelled Wateman. "That jedge has sent this feller to tell ye it's all right. Git out, you Kanaks! Shoo!"

He made a scattering gesture as if frightening chickens.

"Here, what's the matter with you?" demanded Heddon, suspecting too much bad whisky.

"Will—" Wateman spoke loudly, with a backward glance toward the young man who had come near—"I went right down to the club—right into it—with ever'body round, an' told what I knowed. That I was peekin' through the window. An' she shot herself. I saw her, I did! It's all right now—ain't it?"

Wateman turned his fiery red-rimmed eyes challengingly on the young jaundiced-faced man in the pith helmet. He was Bishop, Judge Davies's deputy.

"Judge Davies," Bishop explained in a tired voice that seemed faintly stirred with excitement, "has had new evidence brought to his attention—this sailor, Wateman, came to the club and told his story——"

"An' I took that Kanak liar 'long with me!" said Wateman, looking up for approval at Heddon.

"—so Judge Davies has sent me—I am Bishop, his deputy—to dismiss the guards and inform Oxenham that the charge against him has been withdrawn."

Judge Davies' justice could be as informal as high-handed.

"I took that native right to the Club," said Wateman, talking rapidly. " 'Look here, Jedge,' I said right to the Jedge, 'This here black-hide lied to ye. He didn't see nothin'. I know. I was lookin' through the winder meself.'

" 'You lied, didn't ye?' I said to that feller, right there. An' he said he did lie. I'd have et 'im up right there if he didn't tell the truth. He knowed it!"

Oxenham had come to the door and was looking out with a sort of weary hopefulness, half-afraid to believe what he had heard.

"It's all right, Oxey," said Bishop, laying a hand on Oxenham's arm. "Judge Davies sent me to tell you. This seaman here came right into the club, as he says, pulling Kuou along by the ear——"

"By the hair," Wateman corrected. "I had 'im by the hair, the dirty liar!"

"You were looking in at the window?" Heddon asked with ominous slowness. "Then why the —— didn't you say something long before—when the judge was up here? Why didn't you?"

Wateman stared at him with eyes full of meaning, then with queer bird-like jerks of his head looked from side to side, and answered humbly:

"I didn't have no chanct hardly. I didn't know what was up. I didn't know what all was goin' on. That's what I told 'im, too, the jedge."

Heddon frowned, eying him a little angrily, and puzzled.

"I am sorry, Oxey," said Bishop, reaching for Oxenham's motionless hand. "We are all sorry, all Lianfo. Judge Davies himself was glad this new witness came up—he sent me up with him, right away. I apologize now for that fool racket we made on the beach this morning. All the other fellows feel the same."

"You mean it's all over—everything?" Oxenham asked, letting Bishop pull his hand as if it were dead.

"It's all over. Don't hold it against the judge. He makes mistakes. He feels awfully bad and——"

"And what is he going to do now with Duclos and Sanderson?" Heddon demanded.

"Why, I don't know. You're right though, something ought to be done. I'll take the matter up with him and—" Bishop fumbled about uncomfortably for words—"and, well, something will be done. Duclos ought to have been run off the beach long ago."

"Hanged, you mean," said Heddon unpleasantly, eying the uncomfortable Bishop.

The native police, chattering cheerfully, had pattered off.

Oxenham dropped into a chair and dully tried to realize that it was all over, everything but the memory of it—and that would distort his dreams for years to come.

Heddon stood near by, watching Bishop leave, and when he was well beyond hearing, Heddon turned and laying a hand on old Wateman half-dragged him around a corner of the veranda, shook him, and in a low voice that Oxenham might not overhear, said half-affectionately—

"You're the biggest liar in the South Seas!"

Wateman grinned, looked away toward the white form of Bishop moving among the foliage, then gave Heddon a laborious wink—

"It done the work."

"But where were you?"

"I was back in the kitchen, lookin' for a drink. I found it, too. There's more. I didn't even hear the gun go off. First thing I knowed, the town had come up here an' he—" Wateman gestured—"was in the brig. An' you, too, I thought. I didn't ask nobody questions. I jest listened, keepin' out o' the way prutty well till I found what was up. Then I went off under a tree an' smoked my pipe. I had heard a feller say nobody had seen Oxey do it—that the nigger saw the gun in his hand, an' that Jedge Davies ought to know a native was a liar. Then I went down to the village lookin' for that Kuou feller. I found 'im. 'You come with me,' I tells 'im, an' I tells 'im he is a liar. He says so, too, after I talk to 'im a bit. Then I takes 'im to the club.

" 'Where's the jedge?' I yells. You ought've seen the stir.

" 'What is it, my man? What is it?' they was all sayin' to me. I tol' 'em. In my time I've been to court once or twict, an' I learned how to make 'em b'lieve ye. Be jest like ye was boilin' over. An' I boiled. That Kuou was scared.

"That jedge he sure looked glad to see me. He wanted to know why I'd been so long about comin'. I tells 'im that at first I'm afeard 'cause onct I was a witness an' the joeys run me in jest the same as if I'd shot the feller. But I tells 'im I got to thinkin' it over an' made up my mind to tell it, an' bring Kuou along too.

" 'That was right, my man. That was right,' said the jedge, lookin' pleased. Kuou was scared. I was afraid he wouldn't stick to what I tol' 'im——"

"Well, he hadn't seen any gun in Oxenham's hand."

"No? I'm glad o' that. Not that it'd make any diff'rence, y' understand. Only on the way to the club I had to punch him a time or two for sayin' he *had* seen it. He stuck to his tale pretty hard. I'm glad I punched 'im good. I hate a —— liar!"

"Listen, Tom," said Heddon. "Don't let Oxenham know. He might go down and tell the judge. He's that kind. He ought to be in a convent."

XIX

HEDDON'S advice to Oxenham was:

"Chuck it all and get off the island. I'm going out in the morning. I'll take you. You can't get a ship directly to the States for a month, and you'll have to stand the stares and sneers and jokes till you go."

"But my affairs here on the island—who would attend to them?"

"Your affairs? Chuck 'em!"

"But the money. I've invested more——"

"What's money?" Heddon demanded sarcastically.

"Why, why it's—it's—you don't mean

that! You're just talking. You've always said unreasonable things."

Oxenham looked at him with tolerant affection.

"And did them, too," said Heddon, without interest.

"Yes, you know you did."

"But I never had the money madness. Plenty to eat, a bit to drink, a little work with a gamble in it, that's enough. Money's like a dragging anchor when you try to get under way—slews you round and round where it's fast. Not for the whole blasted island would I stay here a month and go through what you'll have to go through—without slapping any man's face! You never slapped anybody, not even on the wrist. Chuck it all and go out with me."

"Where are you going?"

"To the Kulicos first. Then throw a match on the deck and we'll lay a course as the head falls."

"I'd like to, but——"

"Of course, 'But'! You never did anything in your life you really wanted to do. Always boggled over what was 'right.' Heavens knows, I don't really want you on a ship, but you were decent to me when all the other Oxenhams and Heddons thought I had wrecked their social and diplomatic careers—I'm trying to pay you back by giving you a touch of the real sea. Stale grub, hard work, with hot red whisky waiting for you in every port. Chuck it all, and come!"

Oxenham regarded him with a kind of wistful admiration:

"You always were good to me, Will. I always knew how to take what you said."

"You never did—because you never believed me."

"How could I believe the way you said things when you were always good to me—from the time you whipped big boys that teased me, until now?"

"I liked a fight—now and then. Still do. But I'd take anybody off this island that's in the mess you are."

"It would be confessing failure to go off that way—to drop everything and run," said Oxenham.

"What do you think it's confessing to stay here and be miserable? That you are a blasted coward, afraid to do what you want!"

"I want to go. I really do. I'd like being with you. But I can't chuck, as you call it, everything."

"All right. I'm going back to the ship. It's getting late."

"I wish you'd stop ashore with me. Stay all the time. We would live out at the plantation and——"

Oxenham leaned forward persuasively; but Heddon stood up, stretched his shoulders, looked about inattentively and said:

"Wonder where Wateman's hid himself? I'm going back to the ship. Out the first thing in the morning. You'd better come."

Wateman was found asleep in the kitchen; he was in a chair that leaned back against the wall, and his feet were on a table, a pipe dangled from his mouth and a half-emptied bottle was on the table.

"Now I've got to carry him down the road, into the village, before everybody!" said Heddon, eying Wateman in disgust.

"Take the bridle path—you won't be seen by many people," Oxenham explained. "It's shorter, too."

When Wateman was pulled off the chair, however, he came up fairly straight, blinking his red-rimmed eyes in perplexity.

"How many cracks can you walk, Tom?"

"All of 'em!"

"We'll take a winding path. That ought to be some help," said Heddon.

Oxenham watched them go; Heddon, tall and straight and broad, with a lithe swing of body, suggestive of a challenging recklessness. Oxenham felt a sudden smothering pain in longing for his companionship. Wateman was hunched over; he wobbled a little, now and then stumbled. Oxenham was nearly envious because of the companionable grin Heddon gave the half-drunken old fellow when he struck off the supporting hand that Heddon offered.

Oxenham could not understand, could not begin to understand, what there was about such a rough red-eyed old man to attract the friendship of Will Heddon, who to him from boyhood had been pretty much of a hero.

Heddon had always done just about what he wanted to do—and he had ruined his life by this recklessness, by a colossal folly that gave official Washington hysterics. But at that, Oxenham reflected, Heddon's folly had not been so great as his own. A false woman had been behind each of them. In that he felt there was really a new kinship between him and Heddon.

He strongly felt that he should have gone with Heddon—got away from people. The thought of ever again seeing Peggy Cardan, which was really the thought of having her see him, gave Oxenham a shudder. That was the one thing about remaining on Lianfo that he felt he could not endure.

Heddon was going out first thing in the morning: Oxenham returned to a veranda chair and debated indecisively with himself.

"Chuck it all—chuck it all—chuck it all," ran through his head in a remembrance that was like an echo of Heddon's reckless harsh voice.

THE bridle path wound with serpentine writhing round angles, through masses of dense growth, across the babyish trilling of small spring-fed streams that trickled through fern beds.

It was late afternoon, and heavy shadows lay under the thick foliage. Whenever jungle shadows fell on Heddon he was irritated in much the same way as he was irritated by a disagreeable noise in a minor key. It rasped his nerves. He hated the jungle, its darkness, damp, crawling snake-like vines and twisted roots that came grotesquely over the ground, and hated the very silence of the jungle that seemed full of motionless, sinister eyes.

In Heddon's opinion, nothing good ever came out of the jungle; its natives were always animalistic, brutish; Saxons that went into it got disease from the poisonous breath of the invisible watchers that peered out of moist shadows and whispered always the curse that fell on white men who ventured near them.

This bridle path, with sentimental unoriginality, was called "Lovers' Lane." To Heddon a significantly stupid name; that of itself irritated him as he walked along the path. He was enough of a poet to detest easy alliteration, too much the cynic not to resent the sentiment.

"A winding trail through a jungle, Tom—Lovers' Lane! That's really better than the idiots who named it, know. Really fitting!"

"Aye," said Wateman, stumbling on noiselessly over the soft black mold, with hardly a glimmer of what Heddon meant. "Lovers is idjits."

"And wherever you find pearls, the nearest land is either desert or jungles. Ever think of that, Tom?"

"Aye. Pearls is like womin. I know womin, I do. I don't like 'em," Wateman answered owlishly.

"Most women are like vines—only a few like pearls. But the little thorny bide-a-wees, that hold a man, the thick strangling lianas—see there, that tall ironwood where she has crawled up him, seductively round on round, only to leave him half-way up for the other tree. See how she coiled across? If I had an ax I'd cut that —— Delilah down!"

Wateman stood blinking upwards, and saw nothing, but he nodded sagely, understanding anyhow.

"A woman she left me onct, Will, like that. I fixed 'er proper. I learned her to play skylarkin' tricks while I was off to sea, I did! Ol' Bennings, he was too soft with womin. But he'd fight for his pearls. Queer how men is. Wouldn't ye give all the pearls y'ever saw for the woman y' wanted—wouldn't ye, Will?"

"No," Heddon jeered, "I'd give all the women I ever saw for a pearl no bigger than what's in that head of yours!"

Wateman stopped, and in thoughtful puzzlement felt of his head, back and front and sides, took off his hat and ran his hand over his thin hair; then, with conviction—

"Ye're a liar!"

They heard the soft *chomp-chomp* of a horse's hoofs, and a woman on a side-saddle came to view, almost upon them, around a sharp turn in the path.

It was nearly as if the dark wizardry of the jungle had thrust her upon them unawares to confound their boasting.

She was as surprized as they, though like a fair apparition in thick afternoon shadows she sat her spirited horse and glanced in alarm from the half-drunken Wateman, bandy-legged, grotesque, not unlike some strayed reveler from a satyr's frolic, to Heddon, whose dark face had instantly clouded. She was dainty, lithe, straight, golden-haired, deeply blue of eyes, with a rich pearly luster of complexion that had been guardedly shaded from the tropic sun by wide hats or silken parasols.

She stared in fear at Heddon, touched the horse with riding-crop and would have pushed by him on the narrow trail.

He raised his hand, gesturing for her to stop. It was as if he reached toward her and in her alarm she thought he did just that. She touched the horse with a spurred heel and struck down at Heddon frantically with the crop. The blow hit him in the face.

"You ride men down, do you!" Heddon growled, lurching at the horse.

His hands snatched the reins close under the horse's mouth. With powerful jerk and lunging push of body he set the horse back on its haunches. She struck wildly at him, swayed in the saddle, and, half-falling, was caught in Heddon's free hand. She might have recovered her balance, but was jerked off, yet steadied on her feet as she came to the ground.

"So, Peg Cardan, you think you can trample any man under foot, do you!"

She cried out, frightened. He turned loose the horse and clapped his hand across her mouth.

She struggled, but he hardly noticed. Her efforts were little more than a bird's would have been in a child's clamped fingers—a fluttering tug and jerk. Her soft arms and body strained in frightened writhing, but with hand to her mouth, Heddon held her. Her strength simply meant nothing against his strength. He scowled with a sort of puzzled anger into her wide-staring eyes.

"Know what I've a mind to do with you?" he demanded savagely, holding her up though her knees had given way. "Take you to the ship!"

She tried to shake her head in pleading. She could not speak through his hand. Fear swelled her eyes.

"Take you to the ship," he repeated, less as a threat than the thoughtful statement of what might be done, as if considering the matter. Then abruptly:

"And that's just what I will do! Take you with me—where you belong anyhow!"

"No, Will! Will Heddon, no!" cried old Wateman, shuffling closer. "We ain't no right, an' there'd be —— to pay! Will Heddon, ye don't mean that!"

"Don't I? Well I do. I know her, and her kind, and what she needs!"

"It ain't right, Will Heddon!"

"It'll be the nearest thing to it I ever did with a woman! You go down to town, scare up our crew—it'll be dark in half an hour—bring the boat down along the beach below here. I'll cut down this hill with her and wait for you."

Old Wateman blinked, shifting restlessly back and forth:

"Ye mean it, Will? Ye don't mean it?"

"I mean it, yes. We'll go out to sea tonight. I know what I'm about. Do as I tell you!"

"Aye, it's as you say, Will Heddon. But no good'll come o' it. I warn ye, Will!"

"Then go!"

"I'll go. Aye, ye know I'll go." But he made no move except in the uncertain weaving jerkiness of body. He stood teetering on unsteady feet. "Ye're hurtin' her, Will. Ye're chokin' of her!"

"Not so much as she's hurt a man or two. Go, as I tell you!"

"I'll go. Ye know I'll go. But ye're hurtin' of her!"

"One glimpse has turned your old head, too, has it? Who's being soft with women now?"

"No, no!" Wateman protested quickly, in sudden confusion. "Ye're treatin' her proper, Will. That ye are—a woman like her. I'll get that boat."

He lurched off, joggling his arms in great haste, but his legs hardly kept up with the agitated flop and swing of arms.

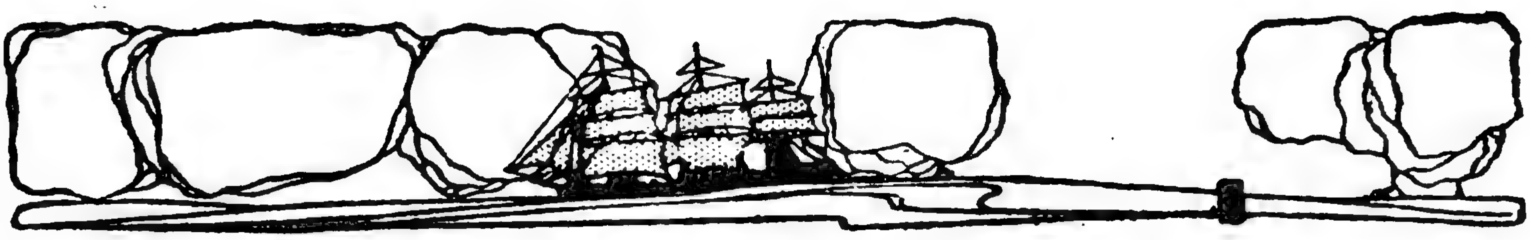
"Now," said Heddon, lifting her up into his arms, "yell if you like—but you'll get choked if you do."

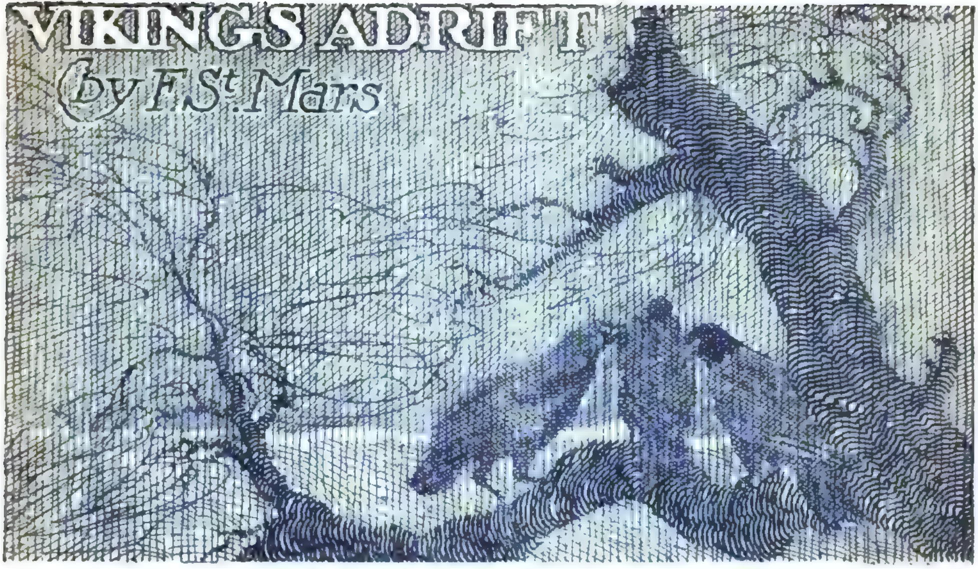
"What are you doing! Where—*where* are you taking me! Please, no, no, no—oh, let me go! Oh, what can I do!"

"Nothing," said Heddon, stepping off the trail and making a sliding drop down through a mass of ferns.

The jungle spirits, old in evilness, may have chuckled noiselessly—it was that much like a satyr's capture of a nymph.

TO BE CONTINUED





VIKINGS ADRIFT

by F. St. Mars

Author of "Antonio," "Blood Brothers," etc.

THE winds were dead. The stillness of the air was almost terrifying. You know that first utter soundless, breath-holding attitude of a waiting crowd when a calamity is announced? So it was on the estuary. It was as if Nature stood frozen on the threshold of the world, finger on lip—waiting. There was no breeze, no air current at all. Even the gulls found difficulty in flying, so stagnant the air. The master flyers, birds of great wing expanse, trust mostly to soaring for their means of locomotion, and without breeze of some sort, or at least currents of air, soaring becomes almost impossible. The gulls are the first to hoist signals of distress, the kestrel second in a dead calm.

Everything had an air of dread expectancy, an irritable restlessness. Nothing fed, nothing pretended to feed even. Nor were any still for long, and yet none flew far. Something was about to happen, something terrible, and the birds of the estuary—the gulls, the duck, the curlew, the plover, the redshanks, the rooks, the hundreds of Winter larks—knew it. Birds always do know it. Their nerves, it would seem, are attuned to a much higher tension than ours, are far more sensitive to weather changes, charged perhaps more highly with electricity than ours are. They know if there is a depression in the Atlantic, and tell the world of the coming hurricane long before the instruments of Greenwich Observatory have caught the warning. When the gulls soar like silver specks—look out. But when the gulls do not soar at all because they can not, then look doubly out.

A harsh, dry roar filled the air, a background to all other sounds; an uncanny compelling noise that made one pause and cast away, trampling on the sand-bars and along the coast. It sounded like the voice of an angry sea. It *was* the voice of an angry sea.

Still there was no wind.

Bird cries, weird as only the cries of marsh-birds can be, wove an eerie ceaseless accompaniment to the hollow grumble of Father Neptune. To the lost soul wail of the curlew was added the uncannily human whistle of the golden plover, the wild melancholy plaint of the green plover, the piercing, stabbing note of the redshanks, the lonesome call of the cock-widgeon, the harsh croak of the heron, the utterly desolate complaint of a smew, and the ceaseless, gnome-like gibberings, wailings, shriekings, and insane laughter of gulls. And yet it was not a clamor, not a riot. The one dominating fact that gripped and held the affrighted soul was the majestic, the stupendous stilly silence. The voice of the sea only enhanced it. The voices of birds but like the dripping of water in a vast cavern. Over, beyond, above it all was the silence, the stillness of the heavens.

A single great black-backed gull—his wings fully six feet across—passed slowly overhead, heading southward, and as he passed, regarding one with his glassy, staring cold eyes, he said "Eh?" as if some one had asked him a question.

Then came the vikings. They came as single black dots at first, following one another in single file along the tide-line from the sea. They had, in fact, come from the sea, from the east, to be exact, and not so many hours before were scientifically carving the carcass of a stranded sturgeon on the shores of the Baltic. Nearer approach revealed crows, but not ordinary crows. They were bigger than our carrion crow of the black character and coat, with more murderous beaks, greater bone, and more weight, and they bore this distinction—each wore above the black a gray, an almost creamy—for they were old birds—mantle. They said nothing as they came, just soared along in ominous silence, and a man standing on the beach suddenly turned to a companion and pointed at them.

"Ah! I thought so. Here come the heralds," quoth he.

"Heralds of what?" asked his companion.

"Death," was the answer, and the man went away in a hurry to order the pulling up of all boats far above highest tide-line.

These birds were gray crows, which are hoodie crows, which are Royston crows, which are termed Dutchmen or Vikings, or Densmen according to the county of the names. They come from the land of the vikings in Winter. They breed there and winter in England, returning to Scandinavia in Spring, and just as were their namesakes of old they are pirates and pillagers and worse.

The three hunted stolidly up the tide-line, checked, swung round and hunted stolidly back. Nothing rewarded their search, and still in pessimistic stolid silence they bore to in a clump of bent, wind-whipped trees. They said nothing, and continued to say nothing as a white sun sank in a cloudless sky, and one by one the stars pin-pricked the heavens. When darkness fell they were still there, in a row, on the west side of the trunk—humped-shouldered, and dejected.

Still there was no wind.

All night the weird calling of birds continued. It was like the gathering of a countryside before an exodus; each clan calling to collect its members and gather stragglers. All night, too, the stillness held in suspension, as it were, and the hollow rumble of the sea increased. The tension was becoming unbearable. Even man could feel it now, a knuckle-cracking, hair-crawling, irrepressible restlessness, a feeling almost of pain at the base of the skull at back of the neck, an intense desire to do something and of being unable to discover exactly what that something was. So the night dragged on, birds arriving continuously. Goodness knows where they came from, except that it was always from the North. There seemed no end to them, and they began to shout long before they arrived, so that one could catch the little distant voices some miles away.

Suddenly the glassy, treacherous, slimy pools that pockmarked the miles of mud which represented the estuary at low tide, turned to steel, and at the same moment a single puff of wind went sighing over the face of the desolation from the northeast. It was gone in a moment, but it might have been a shouted signal. Instantly the birds were hushed, stilled as by a lifted hand, and in the silence that followed the dirge of the sea took fresh importance.

Another puff of wind, stronger than the first, passed sighing over the waste, and again it was as if it were a signal. There was a sudden rushing roar, not the hollow rumble of the sea, but a noise like escaping steam. It was the swish of thousands of birds on the wing together. The birds had risen. They were in motion. The light of coming day revealed the air full of them. Flock after flock swept backward and forward, rising gradually at every turn till the rushing noise was part of the heavens and the phalanxes were no longer a cluster of separate forms, but clouds whirling aloft. There were no voices. They were quite silent. Then, quickly, the rushing died and dwindled into the southwest—dwindled and ceased. The birds had gone.

A third gust of wind, heavier and longer than those that had gone before, whistled across the land, and with it the hooded crows awoke. But they did not move. They sat dejected and humped-shouldered, waiting specters in the raw cold light of dawn. They sat on the south side of their tree, close to the trunk.

Slowly the tide rose, thrusting steely, snaky fingers over the lugubrious mud, and the gusts of wind joined together into a steady blow, rising as the tide rose. Soon the estuary was full, and—behold a miracle! One hour an utterly naked expanse of still slime, the next a sea of tossing, racing, foam-flecked waves.

The wind rose to a gale.

CAME suddenly a rush of wings. Six rooks were hurtling before the storm, seeking vainly for shelter, and they saw it in the lee of that ancient tree. But there was only one branch and the branch would not hold six. They descended upon it in a cloud to be received by, it seemed, a parcel of fiends. In a flash the hooded three were all life, croaking unseemly curses—at least they sounded like curses—and hacking and stabbing with their murderous beaks right and left. Evidently they knew the value of this the only shelter for miles. Let any take it from them who could. Certainly the rooks could not. They found that out in a very few minutes, and went whirling off in the gale like blown leaves, in a cloud of their own feathers.

Then the wind descended upon them in full force. It was not a gale only, or a storm, it was as near a hurricane as this land knows. Seventy miles an hour must have been the rate of that infuriated blast, and to open a wing was to court being landed in the next county, or country at the best, and disaster at the worst. The duck, who, because of guns, sleep by day at sea, came in in a hurry, and any who had seen the raving waves outside would not have blamed them. But it was one thing to come in, another to stop. Some landed where they meant to. Others where they did not mean to. One nearly slew all three of the vikings before the tree stopped him, and he fell with a broken wing.

The crows looked on and waited dejectedly. They knew that after the storm would follow a feast such as their lives had never known before. Yet they looked dejected, a habit of theirs originating in the fact that were they to show elation on sighting a meal the gulls, who are always on hand, always watching, would immediately flock to the spot and snaffle half the feast. So, in the passing of years, they have learned to assume permanently a lugubrious aspect.

Suddenly out of the flying spray which drifted across the marshes like unto a fog, a big rakish form shot helplessly. It was a herring-gull with its wings quite out of control, so that it came hurtling sidewise and helpless. There was a crash as it took the branches broadside on, and a soft thud as it reached earth, a pathetic heap of great straggling wings and body of gray and spotless white plumage. The crows peered down gloomily upon the tragedy and said nothing, though they probably thought a lot.

The waves were now breaking over the top of the sea-wall, the water on a level with it, a phenomenon never before known in the memory of the oldest native. Acres of marshland reclaimed in years had in one swoop gone back to their mother sea. All was water and flying scud which blotted out the view so that one got for a moment a magic-lantern picture of lashed white waters, tumbling barges and small schooners high up, as it were, above the trees, and then all was blotted out in mist of spray.

It was just after the wreck of the herring-gull and about the time that the storm was at its height, exactly at high water, and as near as might be four o'clock, that calamity descended upon the crows. It came first in an ominous creaking low down in the bowels of the great tree, and it swung and bent in a way not usual to big trees in any storm. The crows, even though possessed of patent automatic gripping muscles to their feet, were all but unseated by the first bound of the tree.

It was followed by another worse than the first, and there were rumblings and rendings in accompaniment. The oak seemed to have been transformed into a live thing, a bounding, kicking monster, uncontrolled. The crows hung on for dear life. Not for anything would they leave the shelter of that trunk, against which they closely pressed, and risk the unknown in that insane wind. Nevertheless they could not ignore the fact that all was not well with their harbor of refuge. The branch on which they sat was no longer horizontal. It had taken on, quite unaccountably, an angle of thirty degrees. No wind had done this, for the branch was on the leeward side. Nor was it broken. The crows clung desperately as to the roof of a house, wondering possibly what in the name of flight-feathers was supposed to be happening.

Followed then the father of all gusts, and

—the whole world collapsed bodily. No, not the whole world, though in that stupendous confusion it seemed as if it had. The tree had been up-rooted, and simply sat down, and the result to those upon it was not nice. There was, for one thing, any sort of chance of dying swiftly in half a dozen ways; from whirling, snapping boughs, from flying stones, from crushing beneath the mass. Not that the crows waited. They shot away from the tree like bullets from a catapult, and the wind with a triumphal whoop took them, and they went, whirling like paper, from that place. It was no use dropping the spread tails, no use backing-air with frantic wings. Nothing was any use. They hurtled, breaking desperately, across the arc of the heavens and vanished.

Exactly how long those three children of sin fled before that storm is not known, nor is it clear by what miracle they kept each other in sight. Certain it is, however, that they more than once attempted a landing only to cant-wing and lift again because of the certainty of disaster by smashing against earth or trees. Also it is certain that they more than once endeavored to cross the storm at an angle, and were whirled ignominiously broadside on for their pains. The estuary slid past them in quick time; a white horror that may have been the sea-shore followed, and for a long time a waste of maddened waters, gray, sullen, and foam-spattered, followed that. Times a desperate and tattered sailing-ship, the seas bursting in spray over her, would slide beneath; times a tramp, rusty, dingy, and terrified, would go scuttling by, her stern white with the smother of her racing screw, her bows streaming, and once a liner, four-funneled, white-decked, and huge, staggered past roaring like an infuriated bull.

For days it seemed that oppressed sea was all they could see save riven sky, but it could not have been much more than one hour before there came another shore-line even more ghastly than the first, because cliff-bound. Then came land, but darkness arrived at the same time and added its horrors to the storm, so that they had no time to guess what manner of land it was.

At this point they lifted, for though it is bad to lift into the worst of a storm, it is ten thousand times worse to hug the ground in darkness and go to pieces ingloriously on the first house or tree that gets in the way. To make matters worse, if that were possible, our crows had no idea where on earth, or off it, this infernal blast was taking them. They were already far beyond all known reckonings, beyond the most southerly point of their previous Winter wanderings.

True, they had one comfort in all this welter of howling darkness, they were going with the wind and needed but to steer and add the tail as brake, so far as braking was possible, the wind did the rest *gratis*. Moreover, the sea was no longer beneath them, and that to a bird on passage is more than half the battle. Nevertheless there was no joy in thus careering madly through utter blackness at the invitation of a wind that had lost its senses; especially as the process seemed likely to be continued indefinitely.

IT MUST have been somewhere in the small hours of the morning that our vikings, calling continually to each other in order to keep together—since they could not see—became aware of other voices beside their own cruel and grating "Kra-a! Kra-a!" It was as if a host rode the storm in the night, a far-away murmur ahead, a speaking of many throats which the distance made one sound. Others, it seemed, beside themselves were abroad in the awfulness calling one to the other to close the whirling ranks.

Soon it appeared as if a small riot were moving ahead, and—*wallup!* They had collided with a big body moving along, and a hoarse voice out of the blackness said "Eh?" in the tone of one who has just been prodded out of deep sleep. He had not, but they required no light to tell them what manner of creature they had struck. They removed at speed and without apologies. One does not, if one is a gray crow measuring nineteen inches, stop to apologize for running down a great black-backed gull measuring thirty inches in length and six feet more or less in wing-span, notwithstanding it be in an unprecedented storm and at night. Even the eagle does not have much to say to the great "saddle-back." He is not a bird to be trifled with, you understand, for he is armed most villainously to the teeth, is without fear as without pity, and harnesses storms to his own dark ends as most birds harness Summer airs.

They lifted their tails hurriedly and allowed the wind to shoot them on, leaving the gull to soar along in delicious undulations, his snow-white head and neck glimmering ghostlike in the gloom. But the next instant their tails were down again, breaking hard, for a host with wings and barely controlled bodies whirled all round them in the pit-like blackness. Then came the voice of one crying "Cour-lip! Cour-lip!" in a melancholy wail and instantly the cry was taken up on all sides. They were in the middle of a flock of curlew. Wherefore they let themselves go again, having no fear of such gentle birds, and being wishful to get beyond the radius of the infernal harrying wind as quickly as might be.

Soon they ran into the riot ahead, where the stabbing "Tyo! Tyo!" of redshanks, the plaintive "Pee-wit" of green plover, the whistling "Wee-uu!" of widgeon, the harsh "quack" of duck, and the long-drawn clear, single, humanlike whistle of golden plover filled the night. They were all mixed up inextricably, and all trying to keep station and avoid struggling, and into this Babel the hooded ones plunged gaily, gurgling their grating "Kra-a! Kra-a!" to add to the din, and warn the host they could not see that to collide with them was to collide with a beak.

Indeed the question of injury by collision was one not to be overlooked. It takes so little to spoil a wing and a winged bird is a dead bird inside forty-eight hours even in calm weather. This they knew well, for which reason they took care to let forth their graveyard croak at thirty-second intervals, as steamers that hoot their way through a fishing-fleet in a fog. But what they did not know was that this bird host was the same that had left the estuary—guided by what instinct or premonition of coming storm the good God that made them alone knows—twenty odd hours ahead of them. They had settled somewhere along the French coast to rest and were now hurrying south to lands beyond the iron grip of the North.

SOME time after this—time had no meaning for birds, save as to day and night, which are their hours, and the seasons which are their years—the wind began to slacken. It was not so much that flying became more easy, but that one could fly at all. Up to that time the birds could not so much fly as be flown, or blown if you like. Now wings could be used, carefully it is true, but still used. The birds felt that they had at least regained some control of their movements; though it is doubtful if that master pirate, the great black-backed gull, had ever lost it in the height of the storm. Anon the great shadows of mountains crept up to meet them—black upheavals dimly seen in the night—and the crows lifted with the rest of the host to avoid the dangerous summits. Then, after the passage of the mountains, it was safe to drop five hundred feet or so, and instantly the wind went from them and the labor of flight became almost unendurable. The hooded three hung carefully to the flanks of that serial army. Here at least, was company, and here, with the help of an accident or two, or the cutting out of a straggler, might conceivably be food. Who knew what this new land might hold without them?

Slowly the host dropped, or not so much dropped as slanted down, till the clustered intricacies of black-massed trees merged up out of the void beneath, and beyond the trees—it must have been part of a forest stretching many miles—a lighter void slid beneath in which the stars which had come out since the passage of the mountains floated in unbroken reflection, and from which the lost soul wail of curlew and the deep booming of bitterns came up to meet them. Here was water; not sea, but marsh, estuary, or lake, or something, and the land, this unbroken new land, was not deserted after all.

Then the bird host fell apart, broke up like a falling rocket, each flock whirling down on its own invisible corkscrew staircase, whilst earth and air rang and rang again with the excited calls of birds answering birds above and below.

The vikings discreetly sought out a tree and settled in a row on a topmost branch. How did they know what unguessed dangers this place might or might not hold? They were not birds of the night anyway. They were very hungry, famished almost to the point of extinction, but they were no night hunters, and no power on earth, not even famine, could drive them to do their foraging in any but the light of day.

To the horror of the storm that was gone were added the horrors of night. Strange beasts rustled in the dense thickets, and cried unearthly cries. Once something screamed an awful scream, and eyes, yellow-green and cruel, blazed up from below. They did not know it, but the eyes belonged to a pardine lynx. Once, also, something howled the unutterably melancholy howl which none can mistake for other than the complaint of a wolf, and once something not a wolf, began to climb the tree, but thought better of it and went away. There were also owls.

Presently a shudder passed over the land as if a giant had sighed, and they beheld the bossed and weather-carved bole of the great tree beside them stand out from the blackness; the water beneath and about turn by way of palest gray to steel, and the stars pale and disappear. Then came the cold, raw light of dawn, revealing the nakedness of the scene, and driving back the shadows, and turning the land of beautiful mysterious night to prosaic and unadorned day.

Suddenly—as if arena gates were unbarred with a blast of trumpets—the sun flashed forth in crimson, gold, and saffron splendor, and—'twas day. They beheld before them a swamp, which if it had not been so shallow would have been a lake of immense size, and there were trees growing up out of the swamp, and islands, and rushes in battalions, and reeds in armies, and it was peopled by thousands of water-birds, by wild ducks and widgeon and teal and goodness knows how many other duck; by curlew with long legs and sickle bills, and whimbrel of the same fashioning; by greenshank and redshank and godwits, and avocets of black and white daintiness whose bills were like sickles reversed, and night herons and blue herons and gray herons, and by storks and dozens more after their kind.

The crows' necks grew longer and longer as they looked, and their wicked eyes opened wider and wider, for never before had they beheld a sight so wonderful and "beak-watering" as this, the most noted wild-fowl haunt in all Spain.

Soon the three were stringing slowly over the water hunting for that food which, if long deferred would find them lifeless. And they found a duck, a straggler of the army of the night before, who had fallen exhausted among reeds, and him they dragged forth, protesting and without any pleasure at all, to be dealt with after their own peculiar fashion, which if not gentle is at least swift.

Upon him they were feeding, croaking ghost-croaks one to the other and whetting their beaks on branches after the manner of a butcher sharpening a knife, when, suddenly, and without any warning at all, it was as if cannon-balls fell out of the sky and hit the water with a series of tiny reports and high spurts of water. It was not cannon-balls, however, but teal, they who represent in miniature all that is most beautiful in all wild duck. They had dived as they hit the water, but one was behind the rest, and even as the crows looked up sharply, it was as if a bolt fell from out the sky and struck the last teal, blasting him utterly from life so that he burst into a cloud of feathers like unto a bursting shell. But the bolt darted out wings and a fan-shaped tail and turned into a peregrine falcon, who, checking speed miraculously, swerved curved round, snatched up the falling teal before ever it reached the water, and bore it away with a wild and triumphant scream.

Next instant the crows all yelled together and shot into the air, for as if the unguarded scream had called it, there flashed across the blue arc of heaven a shape, and it was like the shape of doom itself. There was no warning, no answering scream—nothing! Just a huge bird, three parts as big as a full-grown golden eagle, with talons all as large, falling like a great steel wedge out of nowhere. He passed the swiftly rising crows as he fell and they heard the hiss of the hurtling body a hundred yards away. They saw the falcon perform some marvelous feat of aerial acrobatics and go out in a cloud of feathers, and when they looked again the big hunter was sailing away over the tree-tops on huge overshadowing pinions, the teal in his appalling talons, and the falcon, even the dreaded hunting-hawk of the North, the swiftest and most dreaded bird that flew there, was lying a crumpled and pathetic heap of fallen power among the rushes.

That they had beheld a Bonelli's hawk-eagle, the most wonderful bird that flies because at the same time probably the swiftest, the most courageous, and most bellicose, they neither knew nor cared. It was enough for them that the slayer had passed and left them alive, that a veritable peregrine lay beneath at their mercy, and that, never having had the opportunity to get their own back on the scourge of the northern birds up to date, they were now at liberty to do so without hindrance. They did, and felt the fatter for it.

IT MUST have been about the hour of noon that the shot was fired two miles away on the flank of the mountains, a peculiarly sharp, vicious report such as may be made by a modern Mauser sporting magazine rifle. The three crows were sitting in a row on a gnarled and aged tree, preening their feathers and hanging their tired wings out, as it were, to bathe in the warm sun's rays. They were also taking notes, brain-notes, of their new surroundings; watching the booted hawk-eagle who sat whistling all alone on a dead pine; fascinated and amazed at the sight of a flock of flamingoes, each bird of a delicate rose, and many standing six feet high; keenly interested in the apparition of a black stork, and stupefied almost to falling from their perches at the sight of the rare great white heron, who had thoughtfully placed himself in high relief against the deep-grained chocolate stem of a mighty tree. So, you see, they were not thinking about the shot at all, though in England they were wont to make half their living off the wounded that sportsmen failed to find.

Therefore, when a mighty maned and antlered stag came splashing out through the shallows about fifteen minutes later they at first took to the air fearing a man. He was a fine stag, a fourteen pointer, and in any setting he would have looked grand. But all was not well with him. His head hung, his tongue lolled from out his mouth, the perfectly molded flanks heaved, and there was a stain, exactly as if some one had spilled a glass of old port wine there running from the shoulder downward.

The crows noted these things, and just for a second, their professional attitude of permanent dejection went from them. In their own land it had always been they who had the last word in things wild—they and the wolves. They knew that stain, had seen it before, you understand, and they looked upon it and the signs that accompanied it with keen professional interest. After all, what would you? It was their business.

They watched him splash to an island, saw the rushes and reeds round a thicket close after him like green curtains falling back into place, and heard the long blast of breath as he lay down in the stillness. Then one after the other, they flapped to a gnarled, stunted tree that overhung that thicket, and there sat. To judge by their looks one would have thought they were awaiting their own death instead of the death of another.

Thus they sat, looking nowhere in particular except straight down their own beaks, and wondering if the stag would die first, or some one find it first, when a shadow, like a cloud, slid slowly across the green and bronzed leaves of the thicket, across the whispering rushes, across the mottled water, and for a moment it put the sun out as it covered them. There were at the same time stiff rustlings, a breeze smote the tops of their heads, and the air went "*hough, hough.*" Then they looked up, gave a yell of terror, fell backward, and fled.

So intent had they been on the feast to come that they had quite failed to notice the dot that grew out of the deep blue above and hung itself up, rotating slowly, like a sign exactly above where the stag lay dying. Nor had they beheld the other dots—they had not been there before—which gathered from north, south, east, and west, till there were in all perhaps a dozen. Finally they had by no means beheld how these same dots began to let themselves down, always rotating like falling paper in circles, till they grew and grew and grew and became at length huge overshadowing shapes, birds perhaps ten or more feet in wing-span, griffon vultures to wit, and none other. The crows came from the north, as you know, where vultures are not, and Bonelli's hawk-eagles have no being, and they feared greatly, ascribing to the vultures the character of the hawk-eagle, and seeing in them, therefore, the very personification of doom.

Be this as it may, they never got over the shock of those vultures. It was the size did it, for that size was beyond anything in their experience. Moreover, those terrible shadows seemed to dog them day by day till they became a nightmare, and eating a terror punctuated with wild stampedes. True, if a small thing died, like a duck for instance, it was only the ever wheeling kites that bothered them much, and they could put the fear of death into any kite going, but small things did not die often enough; even though occasionally helped by them.

It was generally the big things that adorned the menu; a mule drowned, a deer wounded, a horse shot by the "*Guardia Civile*" because its rider had reasons—contraband mostly—for being deaf to the shouted summons to halt, and always before they had even got so much as a mouthful, down would rush the vultures, and they might find a snack or two when the great griffons had finished if they would; mostly they could not. Moreover, as if this were not enough, the gray crows found themselves coldly received. They were, in fact, coldly received in England, also, each Winter, but that was different. In England man alone was their only real fear, the gulls were, if not honorable, at least fairly equal foes. Here, in Spain, it was different. If they were not removing for vultures, they were for Bonelli's hawk-eagles, and the booted hawk-eagle was nearly as bad. If they could for an instant settle to feed there were always foxes and wolves to avoid, and by night there was no rest either, for when owls were not flapping down on their tree, a pardine lynx was more than likely to be climbing up it.

The climax came, however, when on a blood-red dawn, when the mountains smoked away their mists and the marshes steamed as if they were fed with hot springs, and the kites shot up out of the gray fog like dolphins out of the sea, the crows might have been seen stringing one after the other to the mountains. Two mules had gone over a precipice there the day before, and had not returned, and the crows had hopes that they might discover at least pickings. As a matter of fact, they discovered none, but found instead something else more substantial than any pickings.

The vultures had left only bones, and from these there rose, with the thigh-bone of a mule in her beak, a bird. She was not more than a trifle over nine feet from tip to tip of her pointed wings, that bird, and she had an odd little tufted beard, and she was neither eagle nor vulture, for, apart from her completely different livery, neither eagle nor vulture would be such a fool as to carry away laboriously a bone picked bare as the naked rocks around and of about as much use. The crows pulled up on a rock below to watch and pass remarks, as is the custom of crows, and—whuff! The bird had dropped the bone so that it fell—fell so close to them that they dodged—and smashed to pieces on the rocks. Close after it came the bird herself, diving in swiftly narrowing circles, and passing so close that they could feel the draft from the immense wings. Then they fairly danced with excitement because the bird alighted and fed calmly on the delicious marrow from the broken bones, whilst the vultures circled and circled above enviously watching a feast they could not comprehend. But the crows could comprehend it. Oft had they in the old days performed the same trick with muscles and cockles along the east coast of England. Only, they did not know that they were watching the lammergeier, the dreaded, fabled bone-smasher of the mountains at her work.

Now the crows had no guarantee that this great bird would not suddenly take it into her strange, long, fierce head to try the experiment of bone-smashing upon them. They had, at a pinch, badgered a golden eagle—heavily laden, be it said—which had passed too close to their nests, and more than once had, at a safe distance—always at a safe distance—harried the lordly peregrine, but who could tell what this giant who lived upon bones and apparently upon nothing else, and was half as big again as any eagle they had ever seen or heard of, might or might not do? They removed, therefore, to the other side of the deep gorge and as they did so the lammergeier took another thigh-bone and rose once more with a rustling frou-frou of stiff feathers. So close to them did she pass that they could plainly see the amazing eye of her, the deep orange iris surrounded by a blood-red ring which is peculiar to all lammergeiers and to them alone. She rose above them keeping directly over them—thus awakening terrible misgivings in all three black hearts—and as she did so a strange thing happened.

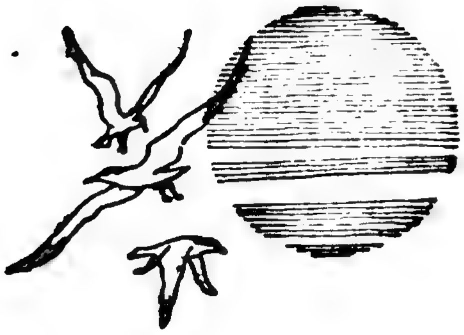
It appeared as if a mighty arrow shot almost vertically upward out of the country that was spread below like a map, an arrow hurled at tremendous speed, swerving neither to the right nor to the left, and the goal of it was the bone-smasher's chest. It struck the great bird fair and square, in a cloud of feathers, and she let forth a scream, wild, fierce and truly typical of the scene.

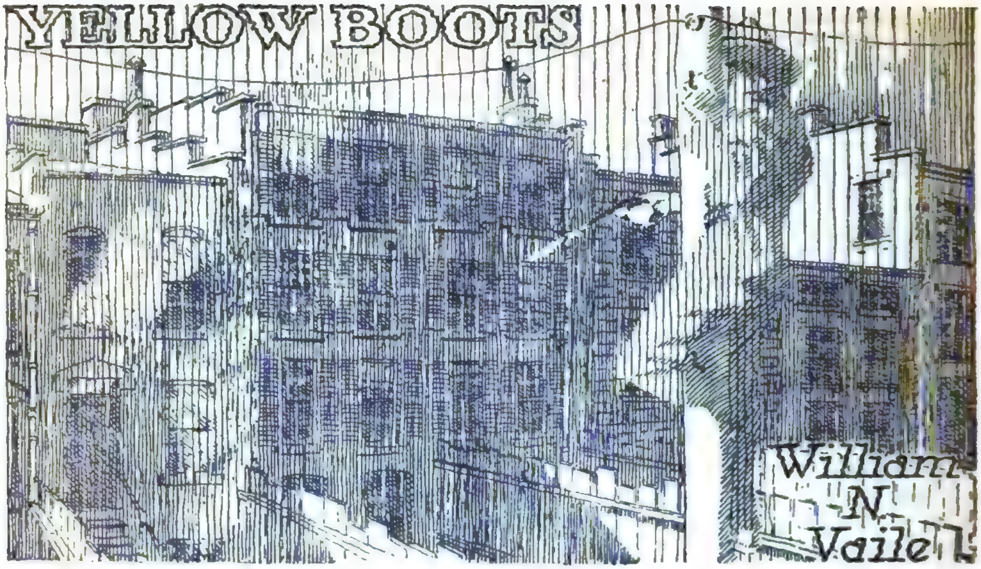
That the arrow revealed itself as a Bonelli's hawk-eagle was scarcely surprizing, since this bird alone out of all the hundreds allowed would have attempted so mad a folly of courage, nor did it matter that the lammergeier, in her surprize and in her desire to turn upon this lunatic and rend him, should quite naturally drop her bone. What did matter and was altogether amazing was that the bone—twirling, twirling, twirling,—should in its descent strike the leading crow full on the side of the head. Indeed, had he not heard the whistle of it in the last moment, and without looking up—he who waits to look up in the wild is lost—miraculously turned on one side in a wild swerve, he would there and then have gone to his fathers. As it was, he went down to the rocks instead, half-stunned, but still using his wings, and when his amazed fellows joined him—they were, at least, no cowards, you will perceive—they found him seated panting on a boulder regarding them steadfastly out of one malignant eye—the other had gone.

For an hour they sat thus while the great battled above, as the great have done since the beginning of history, till they vanished, still fighting, into space. Then at last, when the smitten one was sufficiently recovered, they went. You picture then, three lonely black—they looked all black from a distance—shapes toiling upward with their strong "oaring" flight northwestward over the face of the mountains, till at last they were but specks against the dim, honey-colored piles, creeping up and up till they topped the summits, and, dipping, vanished, and Spain knew them no more.

There is no space to tell how they followed the coast-line of France northward—one sound bird on each side of the disabled one, as ships of war jockey to port a disabled comrade. Nor do I know in what manner they set out to cross the channel. My mind retains only a picture, seen one evening when I was lying flat among the bents of the sand-hills waiting, gun in hand, for the evening bunny. Against the bloodshot eye of the setting sun three coal-black birds showed flying slowly in just above the wave-crests of the channel. They could just make land and no more, and they settled, unknowingly, so close to me that I could see the laboring breaths below the draggled feathers. After a time two of them discovered certain parts of a rabbit which I had thrown away, and with much vulgar clamor, led their fellow to the feast, and when he turned—he was not a pleasing sight in that setting—I saw that he had only one eye.

He is still there. I saw him only yesterday. He has taken unto himself a mate from the tribe of the common black carrion-crow, and there are other demons—variously pied—about to vex my shooting who name him father. The other two, the uninjured ones, duly returned to the land of their birth at the appointed time, and, for aught I know, are rearing other broods of gray vikings with questionable characters to go avoyaging with this pied gang when Winter and her gales come again, as did their three sires before them. But I do not think they will ever see the wonderful adventures of which their father can boast.





"BIG MICK" shivered as his companion led him toward the bank. In the chill brightness of the Western Winter day things seemed clear to the mind as well as to the eye—clear and cold and hard. Stealing a glance at "Peel Eye" he found his partner looking at him with a thought-reading sneer. Mick turned his eyes, abashed, and buried his face in the collar of his shabby overcoat.

But he was due for a little discipline. In front of the bank the smallish older man seized him by the arm.

"Oh, rats!" muttered Peel Eye disgustedly. "Don't jump like that when anybody touches ye. It's the worst give-away in the world. Anybody'd know ye was a raw beginner. Ye ain't done nothin' yet. Nothin' worth while. I just wanted ye to look down the street. What do ye see?"

The young husky peered anxiously in the direction indicated.

"Don't see nothin' at all," he replied vaguely. "Nothin', that is, except a cop walkin' along an' swingin' his club in front of the cigar store in the next block."

"Well, I'm glad ye see him, at least. Tell me, now, what do ye know about him? F'rinstance, does he generally stay on that side, or does he come over on this side?"

"He—why, he keeps on the west side in the mornin', I suppose because it's sunny, an' in the afternoon he crosses over to get the sun on the east side."

"Well, ye can notice some things. Now we'll come into this place, and while I change this bill at the teller's window I want ye to keep your eyes open and tell me all that ye see. An' then we'll folly the messenger."

Peel Eye took his place in the short line before the paying teller's window. His pupil, Mick, knew that at a single glance he could take a mental snap-shot of the whole interior of the place and every person in it. Peel Eye was an artist born, but Mick began to realize that he had also spent much time in training his natural talents. A queer sort of a student, this Peel Eye.

"Mick," he remarked in a conversational undertone as he rejoined the youth beside one of the big square pillars in the center of the room, out of earshot of the cages, "a big philosophy sharp wrote, once, that 'the proper study of mankind is man.' I'm sorry ye don't read more. It's a good interjuction to the real study. But the real science, the habits an' thoughts an' wishes an' movements of men, is what ye'll have to know, or ye can never plan a lay or a get-away. I picked ye to do this job with me because ye're a good play-actor, an' ye've got a nice innercent phiz on ye, but ye've got to learn people better. The messenger'll be goin' out in a minute. In the meantime, what do ye make o' them two fellers standin' over by the cashier's desk?

Mick surveyed the designated individuals from head to toe. One was a solid man of perhaps fifty, with a weather-beaten face

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"Yellow Boots," copyright, 1924, by William N. Vaile.

and a very firm jaw. The other was a rangy six-footer of his own age. He had a long, humorous mouth and shrewd eyes, which roved restlessly and curiously. He was quite noticeably bow-legged. The older man was slightly bow-legged, but it was not so noticeable because his legs were shorter. Both wore white collars and were decently dressed in new-appearing ready-made clothes. Two details particularly caught Mick's attention. One was the brown tip of a pistol-holster protruding beneath the youngster's coat. The other was the foot-wear of the heavy-set man, black square-toed shoes, a sign which Mick had been taught to regard as elementary and infallible.

"They're dicks," he said positively.

"You're dead sure of that, eh? Well, what do ye make of the young feller's shoes?" inquired Peel Eye, smiling with the air of a college professor propounding a catch question.

Mick was bewildered. The young man wore smooth-tipped pointed shoes, of a particularly vociferous shade of yellow. No laces or buttons appeared in front. Mick's glance traveled over the insteps and up the divergent course of the long shins. Peel Eye was grinning broadly.

"Mick," said he, "the reason you can most always tell a man by his shoes is because they're generally the kind he wears for his every-day work, and his shoes are generally the last thing he changes. Still, a man does change his shoes—when the old ones wear out. But there's just one kind of man in the world—leastwise only one kind of a tall man—that has ice-tong legs an' wears high yeller boots on 'em, under or over his pants. The shape of his legs is caused by his work, the boots is a convenience in his work, an' the color is a—well I guess it's just a matter of taste, though —— knows why. That particular kind of man is the most friendly an' unsuspectin' man there is—an' about the most dangerous, sometimes. This is a nice little puzzle for you to work out. Keep a-thinkin', Mick. You're doin' fairly well this mornin', but you're makin' some mistakes. There goes our special study, now. We'll amble along after him an' see how he does his little job."

The bank messenger, an athletic young man with a quick stride, was advancing from the rear cage. With his right hand he was firmly gripping the handle of a heavy currency satchel. He kept his left hand in his overcoat pocket. On the other side of the satchel marched the bank's special officer. He kept his right hand in his overcoat pocket.

Peel Eye and Mick followed them casually to the door. As they passed the cashier's desk, the young man with the yellow boots remarked facetiously to his companion:

"Pete, I don't believe the old man'll have any use for us today, now that they're sendin' away all the money. Like to have the job of watchin' that swag myself. I'll bet I'd watch it grow."

His eye rested for a moment, as if by accident, on Mick, who turned his head away quickly. Peel Eye, apparently oblivious for once to a part of his surroundings, did not seem to have noted the remark, but he, too, took up the subject of watching, as soon as they were out of the bank.

"The first thing you'll notice, Mick," said he, "is that them currency guards walk too fast for us to keep up with 'em. People would think we was in a race. So we'll have to watch 'em today from a distance. An' when we pull this off we'll have to come at 'em from the side. Let's see whether that bull keeps his eye on 'em."

The policeman, it appeared, was paying no attention whatever to the bank messengers. He was standing on the east side of the street, inspecting a window display of shoes, advertised by the sign, "Special Today. Police Shoes, $4.38. The Last that Lasts. For Man's Size Men."

"I see," remarked Mick, "that the bull did cross the street before the sun got over here."

"Yes, this once. But you was right, just the same. He only came over to think about a new pair of shoes like your friend in the bank bought for himself. Ain't it just possible that he bought 'em simply because they was good stout shoes that didn't cost much?"

Mick felt that the evidence of the shoes was perhaps not conclusive. Still, two men quite different from the bank's ordinary customers, two men who were watchful of the bank's money, two men of whom one at least was armed, must be in the employ of the bank as guards or detectives. It behooved folks in the position of Peel Eye and himself to notice dangerous people. Indeed, that was just what Peel Eye himself was continually preaching, and Mick was annoyed and worried because his partner appeared so indifferent in this case.

"Peel Eye," he said, "I don't like them two fellers we saw in the bank."

"No, I don't like 'em myself. Believe me, kid, we don't want 'em around when we pull this stunt. I'd rather have a dozen cops."

THEY walked down the street at a gradually increasing distance from the objects of their present study. The journey to the First National was accomplished practically without incident. The men with the satchel paused for a few seconds at the Third Avenue tracks, waiting for a turning car to round the curve. As they stopped the special officer glanced quickly around, but paid no attention to Peel Eye and Mick, now half a block behind. These, strolling leisurely, had gained a few feet of the intervening distance by the time the bank's men had crossed the car tracks. Both of the latter glanced quickly toward the street, when a big automobile tire suddenly blew out as it scraped the curb in stopping. Peel Eye turned to his companion with a chuckle.

"That suggest anythin' to ye, Mick?" he inquired.

Mick thought that it did, but he didn't quite know what.

"I tell ye, Mick," Peel Eye resumed, after the men with the satchel had turned into the First National, "all ye need to know is your people an' your places. Them guys is both bruisers. They walk fast. They keep their hands on their guns. They give a quick once-over to every one they meet. They take a quick slant behind when they stop. But they're human. A sudden noise like a pistol shot'll make 'em both look to one side for a second. One second's enough, at just the right time and just the right place. But remember, kid, after we've got it we've got to get away with it. You have to study people then, too, only you generally don't have time to study 'em. You have to know 'em right off, an' sometimes you find a guy that you can't figger out right off, or at all. An' like as not he's tryin' to figger you out. Sometimes he's already done it.

"Well, here comes your friends," he added, indicating the approach of the noticeably bow-legged young man and the slightly bow-legged middle-aged man.

The younger paused for a moment to scratch a match on the front of a building. As he glanced up from the lighted tip of his brown-paper cigaret his eyes looked for an instant full into Mick's. It seemed to Mick that the stranger's eyes were inspired by some diabolical spirit of roguery.

PEEL EYE was busy the next day on some preparations for their job. He cautioned Mick not to be seen too much about the bank, but to study the messenger's route and the people likely to be seen upon it. Mick did so, and later dropped into the cigar store and sat down to watch a game of poker in the back room. He was, himself, somewhat schooled in this pastime but he had never before consciously regarded it as an exercise in the study of mankind.

Viewed from that angle it took on such additional interest for him that he watched the players to the exclusion of the spectators. He suddenly felt his flesh creep as his eyes fell upon a pointed yellow boot, its soft leather folds sagging over a long ankle beneath the edge of a pair of cheap trousers. The foot was rocking gently from the owner's other knee, and that owner was sitting just around the corner of the table.

Mick felt a pair of mischievous eyes searching his face. Drawn by a kind of dreadful fascination, he looked up.

"Howdy?" remarked the yellow-booted man amicably.

"Howdy?" said Mick, echoing the word, for want of anything better to say.

One of the players addressed Yellow Boots.

"Want to take a hand, friend?"

"No, thanks," he answered, "I ain't had any luck lately. I guess this gentleman—" indicating Mick—"is better at breakin' into a bank than I am. I been tryin' it for nearly a week now, an' I ain't made no impression yet on the guys that's got hold of the money. I'll just satisfy myself with lookin' on. That seems to be about all of my business nowadays."

The last words dispelled, for Mick, any question as to the man's profession, notwithstanding Peel Eye's contemptuous skepticism. He was certainly a sleuth, and a mighty cold-blooded one. While Mick had been watching a game of chance this man was figuring out a sure thing. While he had been studying mankind for practise the other had been studying him for business, had sized him up, had got his number, and was now tormenting him in advance from sheer devilment

He got out, somehow, and hurried away, quickly turning one corner after another, in the obsession that those bow-legs in the yellow boots were striding with remorseless speed in his immediate rear. He dared not look behind, a sure sign of guilt as he had been taught. By a circuitous route he arrived at last in the rear of an old house on the original street. He stepped quickly into its back yard, and as quickly ducked through the rear cellar bulkhead. Here he whistled twice, softly, between his teeth. An answering signal came from within.

Peel Eye greeted him with a smile and exhibited an ingenious mechanism of strings and a partly disembowelled clock.

"It's goin' to be perfect, kid," said he. "Watch 'em click."

Peel Eye had fastened the works of the repeating alarm-clock firmly on a plank and with considerable mechanical skill had adjusted the cogs so that, by simply turning the "on" lever, a taut string from the hammer of the absent bell would, at each "repeat," release the triggers of two small automatic pistols, each trigger being filed down to respond to a hair touch.

The cellar had formerly been used as a barber shop and was divided into two rooms, the front one being reached from the street by a short flight of stairs. Adjoining the old bath-room in the rear were a furnace room and a coal closet, the latter with a window opening into the back yard for the reception of fuel.

Peel Eye had placed a pistol at one side of and several feet from the partition door, pointing through the front room and toward the stairs. The other he had placed behind the coal window, pointing over the rear bulkhead door and toward the alley. With much pride he displayed the working of the device to his partner.

"It'll take less than ten seconds to run in here an' slip the bag inside a suit-case an' start the old clock to shootin'. That'll hold 'em for a few minutes. They won't be in any hurry to charge a place when they think there's a couple of men shootin' from the front an' rear of a dark cellar. The time fuse up-stairs'll be started in another ten seconds. An' by the time we've got out through the roof the real fun'll start an' then they won't try to get in at all. The best of it is, they'll prob'ly not look for us at least a couple of days afterward, because they'll think we was still shootin' from below when the show started above, an' they'll think we was caught in that show."

He touched the lever of the rigidly secured clock and demonstrated by the perfectly timed clicking of the empty automatics that these mechanical details were completely arranged.

The first floor of the building was a carpenter shop, but the carpenter, as they had ascertained, was now absent during the daytime on a new building in a distant part of the city. It had been an easy matter for Peel Eye to fit a key to his cellar door. The second floor, which was also the top floor, was full of old lumber and inflammable material, including some half-empty paint and oil cans.

There was access through this second floor to the roof, which was almost flat, with a gravel-tar covering, and was concealed from the street by a three-foot elevation of the front wall. It was not concealed from the alley, but there was not much traffic in the alley. The building on the other side of it was a warehouse, with a high, blind, rear wall which would afford no window observation posts to anybody who might be attracted by the shooting. And, in any event, the distance was very short from the roof hatch to the window of the room which had been rented by the conspirators in the adjoining cheap lodging-house.

Altogether, the plan seemed as nearly complete as it was possible to make it.

Monday would be the best day, said Peel Eye. The drug stores and other places which kept open on Sunday, and the stores which did a large business on Saturday night, all banked their deposits for two days, or for one extra heavy day, on Monday morning. Consequently much more currency was taken on that day from the small bank to the First National.

But waiting till Monday was a strain on the nerves of the less hardened criminal. He was harrowed with impatience to get the job finished—any way—and to be gone, even though pursued.

He dreamed of Yellow Boots. And, in his waking hours, he was haunted by that humorous smile. It was a satyr's smile, a fiend's smile, enhanced by a brown-paper cigaret which did not dangle from the man's lower lip but was always tilted at a saucy angle.

Twice he spoke of his fears to Peel Eye. The first time the latter had responded ironically.

"Well, kid, just keep on observin' an' ye'll learn somethin'."

But, the second time, his partner had displayed irritation.

"Say, Mick, are ye losin' your nerve? Whatcher worryin' about that guy for? He ain't nothin' to us. He's got troubles of his own. All he wants is money, just like us. Buck up, can't ye? —— me if I ever pick such a nervous ninny for a pardner on another lay!"

On Monday morning Peel Eye, satisfied with his preparations, lay comfortably on his cheap bed through the early part of the forenoon, smoking, and reading a strange book of which Mick had never heard. "The Sorrows of Young Werther," it was called. Now, why in the world should anybody be reading a book like that when he was going to pull off one of the big jobs of the year, when perhaps he would have to kill a man, or two men, in doing it?

MICK put on his overcoat and escaped, resolved to roam the streets until the zero hour. An impulse which he could not resist drew him near the bank. It led him also to overcome his fears and to eavesdrop when he saw Yellow Boots, with his partner and the cashier, on the sidewalk.

Apparently the two detectives had waylaid their employer for a private conversation, but he did not seem to regard it as very confidential.

"Now, look here, Williamson, and you too, Hendricks," he was saying jovially, "I don't believe all you tell me about your prospects. You're in a good business, and I realize that you know your business, but right now it's a rather risky business. However, I'm willing to take a little chance myself, when I know my men are on the square. I'm sorry you've had to hang around here so long, when you have other work to do, and I'll say I don't know anybody else who would have had the patience to stick at it the way you've stuck when things didn't work out as you expected. I've taken the matter up with the board three times now, and I'm glad to tell you that they've finally O. Ked the deal. So, I'm going to let you have your money today. I like to see you but you're an infernal nuisance. Come on in and I'll fix up your account and get rid of you."

Relief, at last, for the harassed Mick. The sleuths were to be paid off and released from the job of guarding the bank. Well, he hoped he'd never see Yellow Boots again.

He returned to the sidewalk in front of the cellar, where Peel Eye, wearing a long raincoat, was waiting for him. His partner noted his changed expression.

"Got your nerve back, kid?" he inquired with grim jocoseness. "Well, you'll need it mighty soon now."

Indeed it was only a few minutes before they sighted their intended victims leaving the bank, the messenger walking with a slight sag toward his right side on account of the unusual weight of the satchel.

Peel Eye and Mick engaged each other in conversation, developing it into a wordy altercation so that the bank men could plainly see, if they cared to notice, that the discussion, whatever its nature, was interesting enough to involve their whole attention. The messenger and the special officer gave one keen glance at the arguing men as they passed.

But the instant they had completely passed Peel Eye tossed a large torpedo onto the street pavement. Both guardians of the satchel looked toward the street in sudden astonishment, and at that moment Peel Eye struck the messenger a powerful blow on the back of the head with a blackjack. Taking one stride beyond his companion, Mick felled the officer, whose gun dropped from his hand at the moment that it emerged from his pocket.

Whether the messenger was still conscious, or whether his clutch was unconscious, his hold on the satchel handle was so tight that Peel Eye had to strike the knuckles two crushing, bone-breaking blows before he could loosen the grip of that strong faithful hand, but the fingers relaxed at last, just as the policeman started with a rush, fearing at first to shoot, lest he should hit the fallen men. One bullet, sent just as the robbers ducked into the cellar, imbedded itself harmlessly in the wall of the entrance.

In the rear room, the starting of the firing-mechanism was, as anticipated, the work of less than ten seconds. While Peel Eye, turning a pocket flashlight for an instant upon the clock, released its lever, Mick, in the dark, slipped the currency satchel into a wide suit-case. In his haste he dropped the key in the litter on the floor, but he did not make much effort to find it. The suit-case would never be unguarded and its lock would hold fairly well even if the key were not turned in it.

Peel Eye paused on the first floor to light a fuse leading to a pile of oil-soaked shavings. Each pistol in the cellar had barked once as Mick, with the satchel, left the first floor. He was sure that he heard one shot from the front of the cellar, presumably fired by the policeman. A few seconds later a shot sounded from the alley. Then the two cellar pistols spoke again.

On the second floor Mick paused for a moment to wait for Peel Eye and tiptoed to the front window for a glance at the street. The policeman was hurrying out of the basement and as he emerged the third shot came from the cellar automatics. The bank's special officer was pulling himself up on to his knees and was clutching his gun, which Mick had neglected to retrieve when it fell.

Peel Eye's head had not yet appeared above the floor, but Mick dared not wait. Half a minute before, the fire down-stairs had started with a fierce crackle. Now the whole interior suddenly burst into a roar of flame which shot up the stairs. In this weather-beaten building the blaze would reach the roof almost as soon as he could. The whole shell was an oily tinder-box, well-nigh explosive in its inflammability.

He got to the top with lightning speed, the suit-case in his hand. Where was Peel Eye? Had he sought safety again in the cellar? Had he been felled by some chance bullet? Well, too late to help him now.

In the distance of perhaps fifteen feet from the roof-hole to the window of his room, Mick took one glance at the alley and saw something that froze his blood. A man had climbed the telephone pole just behind the alley fence. His legs and one arm were around the pole. His free hand held a pistol ten inches long, with which he was carefully aiming and firing into the burning building. There was no doubt as to the identity of that man, for the long legs wrapped around the pole were cased to their knees in those hated bright yellow boots, which the man's trousers, rubbed up by his climb, now disclosed to their full length.

MICK catapulted through the window and, forgetful of the peril of theflames, threw himself trembling upon the boarding-house bed. There he lay, cringing and shaking with terror. His nerve was completely gone. Was that devil with the yellow hoofs to be forever on his trail? Mick saw himself chased through Hades by the grinning bow-legged fiend.

A desperate shaking of the door brought him to his senses.

"Hello, in there!" said a panting voice. "Hello, I say! What's the matter? Are you drunk? Fire next door, an' this place'll go in a minute."

Mick had a flash of the criminal wit which had originally prompted Peel Eye to select him as a partner. "Oh, aw right, aw right," he replied thickly, seizing the suggested cue. "Comin' out, right away."

Opening the big suit-case, he thrust his coat and overcoat inside it, over the bank satchel. He jerked his neck-tie off, tousled his hair and tore his collar open. Leaving his hat, he grabbed a blanket from the bed and threw it over his shoulders. There was a bottle of boot-leg liquor on the wash-stand. Clutching this with the hand that held the blanket and gripping the suit-case in the other, he lurched drunkenly into the hall. No one there. Down the stairs then, to continue his play-acting.

The audience was just the right one. A fireman in the lower hall was bellowing up the stairs, "Everybody out?" Then, catching sight of Mick, "What the —— kept you? You'd have been blown to —— in three minutes. We're dynamitin' this place. No chance to save it."

"Thash aw right," laughed Mick. "Blow 'er up. Place don't b'long to me."

"Hurry out, you fool," said the fireman, contemptuously. Another, thinking he was not going fast enough, seized his arm and hustled him to the door. A policeman hustled him through the police lines, and here Mick succeeded in displaying sufficient sobriety to avoid arrest while preserving the appearance of having had a drink or two. He correctly assumed that the police would be too busy to bother about arresting a half-drunken man.

This blanket business was a capital idea. To be sure, it attracted attention to him, but it also disarmed suspicion. A good Samaritan in an automobile asked if he had any place to go. This gave him a splendid chance. Of course his one idea was to get out of town. He had little hope that Peel Eye had escaped, but he had agreed to meet him in Salt Lake City if they should become separated. Now, if he could persuade this stranger to take him to the station and help him through the gates he might hope to deceive the eagle eyes of the police who must already be watching outgoing passengers.

"Well, m'friend," he answered in his best drunken voice, "I reckon th' besht place for me is home. I'm goin' back as soon as I can get there—to Salida," he said, calculating that he had just about enough money to pay his fare to that place without opening the suit-case. "This town's too swift for me."

"Looks as if you'd had a good time while it lasted," remarked the motorist, with the sympathy of good fellowship. "Hop in. I'll take you to the station."

Mick got in clumsily, purposely missing the running-board at his first attempt.

"All thish 'citement too much for me," he said to the driver. "Shootin' up the street, an' burnin' up the place next door, an' then scootin' me out, so's they could blow up my hotel. Home, sweet home, for me. Will you have a li'l' drink, friend?"

"No, thanks, and you'd better not take any more now. Keep it. You'll need it for a bracer, when you get over this jolt."

"Oh, I'll be aw right, soon's I get on a train for home."

They were stopping in front of the station. He got out of the car more clumsily than he had got in, and staggered uncertainly.

"Shay, frien'," he remarked. "I think theresh a train leavin' in a few minutes. W'd you mind helpin' me get my ticket?"

The accommodating stranger grinned. He locked his switch-board and stepped down, reaching out his hand for the suit case.

"No," said Mick, "thash aw right. I'm strong enough to carry my grip, but I'm kinda wabbly. If you'd just steady me a li'l' bit at my other arm?"

So steadied, he progressed, with rather unexpected speed, to the ticket window.

"Train leavin' in a minute," snapped the clerk, flipping out the ticket, and the change for Mick's bill. "Hurry up."

More good fortune! Mick's guide was evidently well and favorably known to the police. Both the policeman at the gate and a new one inside, at the end of the train, greeted him with respectful familiarity.

"Who's your blanket friend, Mr. Grady?" asked the latter.

"Poor guy that got burned out of his rooming-house," replied Mick's helper. "Wants to get home to Salida. He hasn't more'n half his clothes, but he's got a cute little jag that'll keep him warm for a while."

"Well, get him on quick," said the conductor, who had joined the policeman. "All aboard."

Mick, by an effort, recovered from his "jag" sufficiently not to miss the step of the coach.

"Mush oblige', ole man!" he shouted to his helpful friend. "Hope I can do th' same for you sometime."

Huddling the blanket around his shoulders, he dropped into the last seat of the coach and set the heavy grip on the floor with a sigh of relief which, from any other man, would have been a prayer of thanksgiving.

POOR Peel Eye! What had become of him? But at least he, Mick, had got away in great shape. Away from that —— town, away from the nerve-racking tension, away from that infernal bow-legged dick with the humorous grin! Mick had flattered himself that he could play a part pretty well till he had met that Yellow Boots man. And when he had got away from Yellow Boots he had played perfectly. Neither Peel Eye nor any other of the old hands could have done better.

But was there always going to be some fellow like this Yellow Boots, to dog a man into his grave? Well, if Peel Eye didn't turn up, and even if he did, there must be enough in the satchel so that he wouldn't have to do another "job." He wouldn't do another anyway. Not even Peel Eye should get him into another.

With the suit-case under his knees he burrowed into the blanket and dreamed of settling down at some decent occupation. But, first, he would have a good fling with some of the money.

He was in the last of the coaches. The sleepers were behind. Except for the trainmen, people from the rear would not be coming forward and people from the front would not be going back to the sleepers. There was a tired old lady in the back seat across the aisle, and in the seat ahead of her were two little girls, with pig-tails. A score of male passengers were distributed further forward in the car. He was in about the best location to avoid curious eyes, but he did not particularly fear them now, for had he not seen Yellow Boots in the alley, shooting into the carpenter shop, a scant half-hour perhaps, before he had caught the train? Yes, Yellow Boots and his companion were farther behind every minute.

The conductor gathered up his ticket, grinning pleasantly at the blanket. The afternoon wore on. The train stopped fifteen minutes at Divide for supper. Mick was very hungry, but he thought it well not to take any unnecessary risks by going out. And he dared not leave the suit-case. Tomorrow he would eat and drink. Tomorrow would be soon enough.

Salida would be reached about six o'clock in the morning. A quick walk from the station platform to an obscure little hotel which he knew, and then he would be safe. He would get some good clothes and dispose of the currency in convenient packages. Another day, and he would be across the State line, among strangers. Life would be one joyous riot for a while, and then he would settle down.

As night fell he ventured to slip his coat and overcoat out of the suit-case. The case itself he arranged slant-wise on the seat, put the blanket over it and composed himself to pleasant dreams of the future. He would settle down, that's it, down—down—oh, what a delicious feeling as he dozed off! How soft was the hard, improvised pillow! His stomach was empty indeed, but his mind was at ease, and his sleep was sounder than he had known in bed for a week.

The sleeper dreamed of a smell, a pleasant, pungent smell. There was something familiar about it, something homelike. And there was a queer sort of suggestiveness about it. Was it the burning oil and shavings of the day just passed? Horror! It was Peel Eye's body, roasting and sputtering in the carpenter shop. The eyes were boring into his with hideous reproach.

It was a strange-colored flame. It was, indeed, a strange-colored smell. That strange and horrible smell, strange and horrible smoke, wove itself into a wreath above the flame of the burning building. And the wreath came down to smother him. He choked, as it reached out human hands to grip his throat.

And yet, oddly, there was something in its essence which was incongruously domestic and friendly.

It was the smoke of a brown-paper cigaret.

AS THIS reality gradually dispelled the dream figments Mick opened his eyes. Their glance fell on his own feet, between the seats, traveled across the aisle, and rose unwillingly to a pair of yellow boots, with trousers tucked into their tops, protruding across the arm of the opposite seat, the seat occupied during the preceding afternoon by the old lady. Their owner, in his shirt-sleeves, unmindful both of the cold and the rule against smoking, was stretched lengthwise of the seat, using his coat, on the window-sill, for a pillow. His wide-awake eyes were fixed on Mick with whimsical scrutiny. The cigaret was tilted at the same saucy angle.

Similarly disposed, but asleep, the wearer of the black police shoes occupied the next seat, the seat previously occupied by the two little girls.

"Mornin', friend," said Yellow Boots cheerfully.

Mick's lips moved with a response, but he could not lift his voice high enough to hear it himself.

"Say," continued Yellow Boots, "didn't I see you nursin' a bottle of red-eye when you got on this car? Would you mind accommodatin' a neighbor with a little eye-opener? We was in such a hurry to catch this train that we didn't have time to hunt any booze. You seemed to be in pretty much of a hurry too."

Mick passed over the bottle with a trembling hand. The detective would drink, it seemed. Indeed, he was taking a pretty good shot of the stuff. Perhaps there might be some chance to escape this fiend. His long gun dangled quite frankly in its holster beneath his unbuttoned vest.

They must be nearly to Salida, but the train was stopped for some reason, taking water, probably.

Mick must make conversation.

"When did you get on?" he inquired.

"Oh, just several minutes before you did. I noticed you seemed to have a nice little bun on." In Mick's fancy there was a slight emphasis on the word "seemed." His persecutor continued, "I was lookin' out of the sleeper vestibule when your friend helped you on, wrapped in your blanket."

"You was in the sleeper, you say?" said Mick, wonderingly.

"Yes, but we gave up our berths to an old lady and a couple of kids. Say, but we nearly missed this train! One of the bank directors was comin' our way and offered to take us to the depot in his car. There was some shootin' on the street, so he hustled us down the alley. Some guy shot at us from an old building. I climbed out for a minute to take a crack at him. There was some feller shootin' from the cellar, an' then I seen a man light a fire in a carpenter shop on the first floor. It blazed up real sudden-like, an' I seen him clear an' bright, with a gun in his hand, startin' for the stairs. Pretty sure I got him."

"Well, why—why didn't you stay an' report to the police?" asked Mick.

"Oh, we reported, all right! I'll say we did! They had to know all about us before they let us out of that alley. And if it hadn't been for that bank feller we'd 've had to stay over. He took us to the police station an' vouched for us there—of course they knew him—an' we promised to come back in a couple of days. Lucky he was with us. We've got some other business now that needs our im-mediate attention."

Mick was sure that he himself was vitally concerned in the business which was so urgent. Was there no means of escape from this bloodhound. The engineer was certainly taking time enough to fill his boiler, but this delay might be his salvation. If he could quickly get off, with his heavy grip, and make his way to some ranch-house. The snowy landscape outside did not look very favorable for such an expedition, but any chance would be preferable to keeping his neck under the hair-hung sword of this bow-legged executioner.

"Well," he remarked, casually, "guess I'll go up to the end an' wash up."

Yellow Boots made no attempt to prevent him, as he took the suit-case to the wash-room at the end of the car, leaving his overcoat and blanket in the seat. He would need them in the Wintry outside, but he would get along without them. He must disarm suspicion. He would get off the train which, no doubt, would soon be moving, and before Yellow Boots and his partner could notice his absence he would find some place of concealment along the track.

Perhaps at the next section house back he could catch a freight the other way. And he could probably drop off of it before it reached the next station, where he might be stopped by a telegram from the police. It was a desperate chance, but worth trying.

OTHER passengers, including the man with the police shoes, were still dozing. There was no one in the wash-room. Watching for a chance to get its door between him and the body of the car, he quickly stepped out onto the platform and dropped off. It would be slow going till he got to the rear of the train, because the snow was banked up almost to the sides of the cars. In his careless haste he had evidently got off on the wrong side of the train.

Fearing every moment that it would start, he put the suit-case on the track between the rails and cautiously followed it, getting out first on the other side and pulling it after him. Yes, it was a little better here, on the lower side of the track. But, gee! How deep the snow was, on the slope below the railroad! It was clearly impossible to cut across country. He floundered along, beside the train, around the curve to the rear end, and there he stopped in amazement. A couple of hundred yards further the railroad apparently ran abruptly into a great hill of snow.

That hill was not glistening white and clear, but was dirty and full of boulders and broken trees. It extended so for some distance up the mountain-side, and there, above it, was a great brown wound of bare ground, a gash extending clear to the vertical crags two-thirds of the way to the peak.

Shuddering, Mick retraced his steps and went to the front. The same thing again, only closer. The hill of snow and earth here almost touched the cow-catcher. Another glance above now disclosed that the snow-slide had been divided by the huge rocky promontory sticking out, like a great Roman nose, a half-mile above the track. At both sides of that nose the mountain's solid tears of burning, rending snow had cut into its very flesh. The snow below the promontory had not fallen, because the slope was not so great, as if the giant's upper lip were swollen.

A dozen passengers were clustered about the engine pilot, discussing the slide and shivering in the chill of the mountain Winter morning. Mick sat down on his suit-case and buried his face in his hands.

Even Nature was against him, determined to avenge his crime.

He shuddered to the marrow as a hand fell upon his shoulder. A voice above him, a voice that he had learned to dread as a pestilence, remarked blithesomely: "Well, old-timer, I'll say our engine-man didn't have much time to stop his train. It's lucky for all of us that we were right in this spot. But if we'd gone over the hill I don't believe you'd have known it. The slide didn't even wake you up. Say! You wasn't calculating to walk to town, was you—with that heavy grip?"

As Mick, whose heart was in the soles of his shoes, made no reply, Yellow Boots continued, with heartless cruelty:

"Well, just keep your shirt on! You might as well be patient. No chance to walk out, an' no chance to pull out till they get some teams to work on that slide. What they really need is a steam-shovel. Anyway we're stuck here for all day. But it won't be so bad. They put a dining-car on at Pueblo. Come on. I owe you a big platter of ham an' eggs for that drink."

Mick's stomach, cringing against his backbone, fairly cried for food, but he declined, much to Yellow Boots' amazement. He dared not deposit his grip and leave it unprotected in the coach. He dared not court attention by taking it into the dining-car.

Yellow Boots finally returned from breakfast, picking his teeth with evident satisfaction. Thereupon his companion shook himself out of his slumber, which Mick considered must have been simulated, growled good-naturedly at Yellow Boots for leaving him to eat breakfast alone, and received the cheerful response that a fellow couldn't be expected to wait all day for a partner who would rather sleep than eat.

All play-acting, without doubt, thought Mick. Evidently, after his attempt to escape, one or the other of them was to remain in constant surveillance.

Toward noon, Yellow Boots proposed a game of poker. Mick did not dare refuse. Both of these men had old-fashioned valises and, as the porter could not be found, to produce a table, Yellow Boots suggested that they use Mick's suit-case temporarily. The older detective sat next to Mick. "Wow!" he exclaimed, as a corner of the suit-case settled down upon him. "Must be full of gold bullion!"

"Well," volunteered Yellow Boots, "even paper money can be pretty heavy when it's wrapped tight in bundles. Remember how that bank messenger sagged with the weight of it? But if this guy's got a gripful of any kind of money he's the bird I want to play with. I'm feelin' lucky today."

The car was cold but Mick was sweating freely. Mechanically he picked up the cards which the older man dealt to him. The two little pairs did not improve on the draw, but he won the small pot.

"Plain robbery, that!" remarked Yellow Boots pleasantly. "Well, money comes easy to some folks."

Mick, playing in a daze, won several other pots with very poor hands, but he soon anted away his five dollars' worth of chips.

"A little more money, neighbor?" inquired Yellow Boots, who was acting as banker. "It's easier for you to get money from the bank than it was for me."

The conductor came through the car.

"Well, boys," he announced cheerfully, "the wrecking-crew from Salida's at work on the head-slide. We'll be outa here in three or four hours now. They brought some morning papers for us, too. Say, buddy," he added, to Mick, "you oughta know better than to play poker with these pirates. They're old friends of mine, an' I know 'em. They're robbers, right."

"Oh, go on, now, Dennis," protested Yellow Boots, "from the way he plays this buckaroo must be a robber himself. But I've got him where I want him now. Raise you two blues, kiddo."

He smiled his diabolical smile into Mick's face as he pushed his chips to the center of the suit-case. Mick's tortured soul cried for peace, peace! His sick body revolted at the strain of supporting his sick mind. His nerves, worn to ragged threads by a week's suspense, stretching, almost moaning, under the accumulated miseries of this horrible day, suddenly snapped.

"You win, you ——!" he cried. "Take the grip! It's all in there. Take everything! Take me to the pen! I can't stand it any longer. I did it! I did it! Oh, my God! Oh, poor old Peel Eye! Don't shoot! For God's sake, don't shoot!" He raised his hands above his blanched face. "I tell you it's all in the grip, the gold an' the silver an' the bills."

Yellow Boots' mouth was agape with amazement, but by some instinct of past training his gun was out and its cold blue nose was pressing against Mick's shrinking diaphragm. The other man, sitting next to the aisle, whisked the suit-case to the floor with a thud. The unturned lock sprung open under the sudden jolt. The straps quickly yielded to the man's surprizingly nimble fingers. Out tumbled the bank messenger's satchel, still locked.

The newsboy, hurrying with the belated morning papers from Salida, stopped dead in his tracks beside the seat, as he observed the gun-play.

"Holy smoke!" he ejaculated, his eyes bulging. "Bill Hendricks, who you stickin' up?"

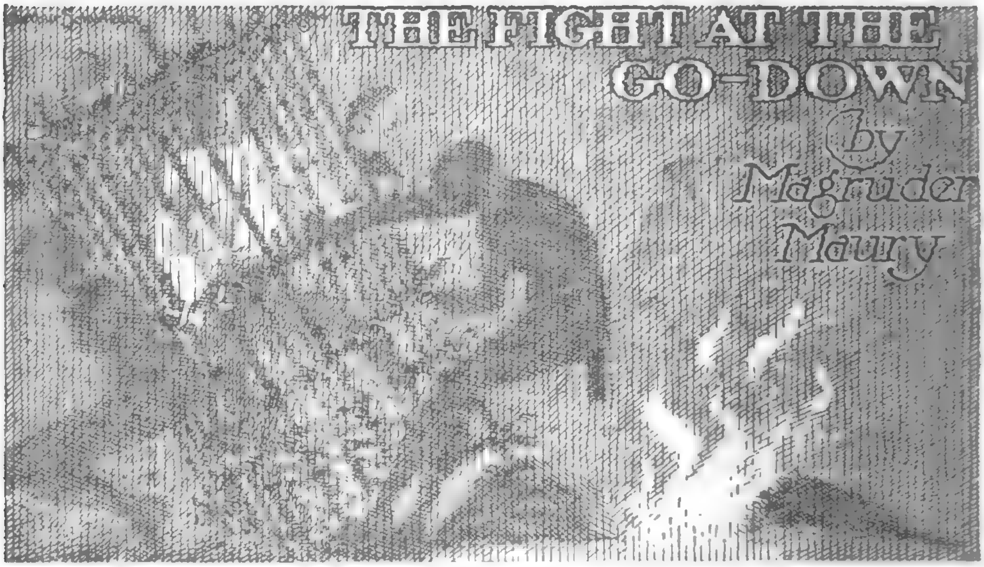
The papers dropped from his hands to the floor, and Williamson's glance fell upon a scare-head slanting across the satchel:

Big Bank Robbery. Five Thousand Dollars Reward.

Long before the snow was cleared from the track the engine of the wrecking-crew had backed into Salida with a message to be sent over the wire. Yellow Boots and his partner agreed that it wasn't necessary to spare expense, so they made it quite complete.

> Mr. Acheson we are certainly much obliged for that five thousand you loaned us to buy our calves and its probly lucky you kept us there so long to get it we hadn't expected to pay it off till wed carried our stock through next Summer but you can just credit us with it now weve caught your robber and got your money and satchel and all hope the boys that was hurt is getting along all right with best wishes to you,
>
> Williamson and Hendricks Cattle Company
> by Hendricks.

"Well," said the conductor, commiserating the prisoner, "I'm sorry for you, kid, and since you didn't get away with it I hope they don't soak you too awful heavy, but when you get out just remember this: Never play games of chance with a long, lanky, bow-legged son of a gun of a cowpuncher. Those guys are just naturally born lucky. You can't beat 'em."


THE FIGHT AT THE GO-DOWN
by
Magruder Maury

Author of "Muzzled Dogs of War" and "Gold of the Yellow Gods."

A TAGAL driving a carabao, their bodies gleaming wet in the level beam from the lantern on the porch of the guard-house, paddled through the rain and mud and disappeared into the dark of the road toward Rosario. Behind them, looming suddenly out of the gloom of the early evening, came Lieutenant Charles Carr, commanding officer of the little army post there on the crumbling banks of the Rio de Pampanga.

He walked with the confident swing of the trained cavalryman. Even the enveloping poncho and the dripping campaign hat could not hide the carriage and bearing West Point had stamped upon him.

Top Sergeant Harry Carr, the lieutenant's younger brother, who was climbing for a commission from the ranks, came to a smart salute at the gate, and the sentry snapped to attention, facing outward.

The lieutenant returned the salutes and strode on to his own quarters twenty yards beyond the guard-house and quarters of old C Troop.

Harry Carr waited until his brother and officer had turned in through the gate, and then followed swiftly, as if he had finally made up his mind to a disagreeable task.

Charlie was bending over a lantern on a table in the back room of the desolate little shack he used as his quarters when the sergeant's step sounded on the split bamboo flooring of the outer room.

"Who's there?" he called out.

"Sergeant Carr, sir," replied Harry, with formal respect.

"Oh, hello, Harry, old chap. Come in. What's up now?"

"I'd like permission to speak to the commanding officer," said Harry.

"Oh, cut out that stuff when we're alone, Harry," said his brother. "I've told you that before. It was an asinine trick of the War Department to send me to command C Troop—and you. But that's no reason why, duty and discipline aside, we should forget we are brothers."

"All right, Charlie," agreed the enlisted man. "But I do want to talk to you."

He had begun easily enough, but his voice trailed as he finished.

The lieutenant swung himself to a seat on the table and looked at his brother from lazy, half-closed gray eyes.

"Shoot," he said. "I suppose, from all this preamble, you're going to talk about Paulita again."

"Yes," said Harry. "She's going to make trouble for you if you don't watch out."

"What makes you so sure of that?"

"She's a mestizo, to begin with—and that's —— bad medicine in itself. But what's worse, she's the daughter of Don Manuel Madero, the *jefe* of this *barrio.* I've tried to keep quiet," he went on, as Charlie's eyebrows cocked slightly over the flickering blaze of the sulfur match he held to the tip of his cigaret. "I know it's lonely enough for you here—but the troop may have to pay for your fun with this girl."

"Just what do you mean?" The lieutenant's tone was cool, unfriendly.

"I mean that in the nature of things Filipino, this mestizo is a spy for the Katipunan. Her father is the head of the society in this district."

"That's guess work."

"Perhaps. Guess work founded on three years of studying these people. You've been here three weeks. I speak Tagalog, Visayan and the hybrid Spanish of the natives. You don't. I've seen the mark of the Katipunan. You haven't. When you've seen some of your men with their eyelids cut off, their noses slit and the flaps pinned with thorns to the cheeks, and a few other little things like that, then you'll feel toward these people as I do."

He stopped, and the steady droning drum of the rain on the nipa-thatch of the shack, mingled with the subdued roar of the river, seemed to deepen the silence that followed. Lieutenant Carr finished his smoke and flicked the butt of his cigaret through an opening in the wall that served for a window.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"Leave her alone. She'll probably pester the life out of you, but you can't help that now."

"Very well," said the lieutenant, not very agreeably. "You're the doctor. She's an amusing little ——, and, except for her disreputable old father, she's the only soul in the village who speaks a word I can understand——"

He was interrupted by a swift patter of feet in the mud of the compound, and a woman's soft voice calling:

"Charlee! Teniente Carr!"

The two men inside the shack looked at each other.

"Now's your chance to begin," suggested the sergeant.

But the girl outside had taken the game in her own hands and was standing at the entrance to the room, the lantern light playing over her slim, rounded figure plainly outlined under the soaked and clinging tapis and camise. Drops of rain sparkled like gems on her jet-black hair and trickled down the creamy cheeks.

At sight of the top sergeant she halted abruptly, her hands going to her panting breast in a pretty gesture of surprize.

Lieutenant Carr stood up, an embarrassed smile on his clean-shaven lips, but an amused twinkle in his eyes, and bowed ceremoniously.

"Permit me," he said, handing her the camp-chair.

The girl's eyes, black as her hair, lost their questioning look. With a haughty little nod, the movement of the exceptionally pretty woman who knows her power over men, she slipped into the seat offered.

"*Gracias, señor*," she said, in the Spanish jargon of the Islands. "I am wet, very wet. The rain, it is bad."

"Quite bad," said the lieutenant. "What in the world brought you out in it, and at night?"

"I come to bring you news, bad news, *señor teniente*. One of your soldiers has been killed, and presently they will bring him here."

Lieutenant Carr gasped, and the face of the sergeant, standing at attention in the dim corner, changed and hardened.

"I come so quick to tell you because I do wish you to understand," Paulita went on hurriedly, not waiting for the lieutenant to speak. "This man who is killed you call Corporal Reeder. He was drunk, very drunk on wine. He come to my father's house but half an hour ago and demand more wine. My father tell him no—that he has of wine sufficient for the time. This man leave the house of my father and go down the road. Pretty soon we hear shouting and much cursing. Then there is silence. I tell my father he must find out what it is that happens. My father goes out into the rain. When he comes back he tells me this *soldado*, this Corporal Reeder, has struck Antonio Sapadio, the ferryman. Sapadio return the blow——"

She stopped speaking and spread out her hands with a significant gesture. It was as if she said:

"What would you? Men must die."

"I'll get the body, sir," said Sergeant Carr, and left the room.

Lieutenant Carr gazed after his brother with troubled face. The girl reached for the bag of American tobacco and cigaret-papers lying beside the lantern on the table and began rolling herself a smoke.

"Why did you come instead of your father, Paulita?" the officer demanded as she tilted the lantern globe away from the flame and bent down to light her cigaret.

"My father is coming," she said, smiling into his eyes over the lantern. "But I came first—because I love you. It was—" her teeth gleamed and her naked shoulder shrugged—"just an excuse. I wanted to see you."

For a fleeting instant their eyes met—a question in both. Then the man smiled.

"Am I worth getting all wet for?" he asked softly, looking down at her as she settled back on the camp-stool.

"Yes," she answered, and her tones caressed. "You are all the world to me."

Voluptuous emotion in her liquid Spanish thrilled him to the marrow of his bones. He bent over her, but the squelching of heavy feet in the mud outside the shack halted the reply that trembled on his lips. He straightened up, and faced his brother who stood in the doorway.

"They've taken the body to the guard-room," said Sergeant Carr, quietly. "Would the lieutenant care to see it?"

"Certainly. I'll go at once."

Without another look at the girl, the officer snatched from its hook his still wet poncho, slapped his soaked campaign hat on his sleek, black head, and followed the sergeant out of the house.

Unnoticed, the girl trailed behind them.

IN THE guard-room a crowd of angry men had gathered about the body on the bamboo bunk. As the lieutenant entered the men made way for him, allowing him to look down at the mutilated corpse.

"He'd jist made the rounds to Four Post," explained the sergeant of the guard, John Gavin. "The —— attacked him between the outpost and the *Jefe's* house. Private Casey, who was on duty at Number Four, heard the rumpus and run to help. He was too late. See!"

He pointed to a curious mark, cut with a sharp-pointed knife into the broad, naked breast of the dead man. It looked something like a swastika enclosed in a square.

"What is it?" asked the officer.

"The sign of the Katipunan," said Harry Carr.

"Eet ees nozzing," said a silken voice behind them, and the men turned, surprized to see that the *Jefe's* daughter had followed the lieutenant into the guard-room, and stood now calmly surveying the scene from beneath coal-black, level brows.

"Sapadio," she went on, but lapsing into the hybrid Spanish of the natives, "he saw red. He is wild with anger at the blow of the corporal. The Tagal men get very angry. It is his mark. That is all."

The bare brown shoulders rose in their graceful, disdainful shrug.

"You say that Corporal Reeder was drunk when it happened?" demanded Sergeant Carr, after waiting for his brother's question, which did not come.

"Yiss," she replied, nodding her shapely little head. "He *muy barrachio*, vair' droonk."

"How long since you saw the corporal, Gavin?"

The sergeant had turned from the girl to the commander of the guard.

"Not more than an hour, Top," replied Gavin.

"He was sober then?" Harry's question was addressed to Gavin, but his eyes were on Paulita who smiled a little mocking smile at him.

"Perfectly, sorr," answered the non-com.

Sergeant Carr bent down and sniffed at the parted lips of the dead soldier. The men watched him as he straightened up and spoke to the lieutenant.

"Not a hint of liquor there, sir," he reported.

"Ut's *dukut*, sorr, plain enough," said Sergeant Gavin. "That's the third to the bolo-men from this troop. The *Sandatahan's* busy around here."

"What does that mean?" demanded the officer, speaking for the first time since he had come into the guard-room.

"*Dukut's* just plain murder," explained his brother. "The *Sandatahan* is a sort of reception committee of the Katipunan. They are the bolo-men, the fighters of the organization."

Lieutenant Carr pulled his fascinated eyes from Paulita's face and looked at his brother.

"I'm going to see Don Manuel," he said. "Warn the sentinels to keep a sharp lookout. I should be back in half an hour, or less."

He turned on his heel, left the guard-room and was swallowed up in the dark outside. Silent-footed, swift, Paulita slid after him into the night and the rain.

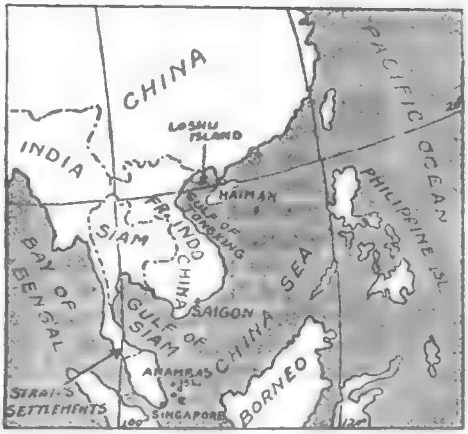
Sergeant Carr gave a few brief orders, carrying out his brother's instructions with regard to the sentries. The body of Reeder was covered with an army blanket, and the relief of the guard went back to their bamboo bunks.

Half an hour passed. Corporal Squiers had returned from the outposts and reported all quiet. The minutes ticked off with the monotony of the rain drumming on the roof.

Harry looked at his watch. His brother had been gone forty-five minutes.

"I'm going to see what's happened to the lieutenant, Gavin," he said to the old soldier whose weather-hardened countenance showed intense, if silent, sympathy.

Don Manuel's pretentious two-story house stood at the northern end of the village. Leaving the guard-house, with its lighted porch showing him the road, Harry plunged out into the rain and mud. Ahead stretched the full length of the silent, sleeping *barrio*, strung along on either side of the one road it boasted. With the light from the guard-house lantern left behind, not a twinkle, not a point of light broke the wet blackness of the night.



At the gate leading into the *Jefe's* big compound he paused for an instant to listen. Hearing no sound, he felt his way to the bamboo ladder leading to the entrance to the lower floor, mounted it, and knocked on the heavy slab door.

Paulita's voice answered the knock.

"Who is there?" she called, in Spanish.

"Sergeant Carr. Where is the lieutenant?"

"He is not here. He has gone hunting for Sapadio." Harry thought he caught a sound of smothered laughter in the last words. "Our house, it is asleep."

He knew that the girl was lying.

"You light the lamp and open this door," he ordered.

There was a stir inside the room, then the heavy slab that was the door swung inward. But Harry, knowing the folk with whom he had to deal, remained outside on the ladder.

"Make a light," he commanded.

A match scratched in the dark, throwing out a sulfurous smell, then the wick caught and the light revealed Paulita, still in her wet tapis and camise.

"Where is Don Manuel?" the American demanded.

"With the *teniente*, seeking the ferryman."

As she spoke, the girl's lips widened in a smile. It was a sardonic, cruel little smile that set flame to Harry's blood. He gripped her bare arm and stared into her face for a full minute, trying to read her thoughts.

"Which way did your father go?" he asked.

"To Rosario," said the girl. "Sapadio has cousins there. The *teniente* is with my father. Together they hope to catch the slayer of the *Señor* Corporal."

Again he knew that she was lying. Rosario lay to the south of the *barrio*, and the only road to it ran past the guard-room, with its lighted porch. No man or animal could pass that way and escape the scrutiny of the sentry on Number One Post. And certainly no one had passed him on the road between the guard-house and Don Manuel's.

But it suited his purpose to let the girl think that he accepted her statement. He dropped her arm, but still kept his eyes on her face.

"I'm going to Rosario, too," he said slowly. "Perhaps I can help Don Manuel and the lieutenant find Sapadio."

He backed ceremoniously to the door and down the ladder, still watching the girl until she closed the slab, shutting off the light.

At the road he swung back in the direction from which he had come, and walked, with much stamping in the mud and slush, for perhaps fifty yards toward the guard-house. When he was pretty sure he was out of hearing of Don Manuel's house, he cut through between two compounds to the rice-paddy back of the town. Here he turned north again and, as silently as possible, hurried along behind the houses until he came to a road that branched off from the main highway and ran through the paddyfields. Near the end of this road was a ruined sugar go-down and central standing on the bank of the river, a mile and a half from town.

Harry had long suspected the old go-down was used as a gathering-place for the bandits and members of the Katipunan who made Baliuag their headquarters.

If the Gugus had not killed his brother, in a momentary fit of bloodthirstiness, and flung his body into the river, they had captured him and were preparing to torture him in their own peculiar way. In either case, the Katipunan would gather at once to discuss the affair and to arrange plans for the torture, or for dodging the consequences of the murder.

And he knew that in dealing with the childish, half-savage people of the district punishment, to be effective, had to be instantaneous, following the crime like the clap of thunder follows the forked lightning of the tropics.

The problem he revolved in his mind as he tramped through the stinking mud of the paddies was three-fold. First, if possible, he must rescue his brother. If this could not be done, then he must quickly avenge his brother's death. Second, he had to visit punishment for the murder of Corporal Reeder, and last, but included in the others, he must maintain the prestige of the American Army. If the Katipunan came to believe that the *Americanos* would not avenge their dead, the army of the United States might as well be withdrawn at once from the islands.

He was now traveling a mere track, cut deep in the mud by the feet of water-buffalo and the sharp hoofs of native ponies. In the dark it was impossible for him to see the mud-holes and he stumbled and fell a score of times, covering himself with the muck of the rice-fields.

At length, after what seemed hours of blackness, he came to slightly higher ground and knew that he was nearing his goal. He made an abrupt turn and emerged into the main river road. Here he paused for a moment to orient himself, and to get rid of the feeling, which had been dragging like a physical force at his heels, that he was going in the wrong direction. A rumble near him told him that a section of the river-bank, undermined by the gnawing waters, had slid into the river. Remembering the curve the river made at about this point he set off for the go-down, at last sure that he was going in the right direction.

He moved forward cautiously. If he was correct in his surmise that the old go-down was headquarters for the secret society there would be guards out to warn the leaders of the coming of any stranger.

He had not gone more than a hundred yards when he heard voices behind him and flung himself down into the ditch by the side of the road. There he flattened himself, hardly daring to breathe, as a little party of three or four natives paddled by him, slopping mud over him as they passed.

When they had gone he arose and followed them, keeping close behind them till they turned through a gate in a stone fence, dimly seen by a reflected light. Harry tiptoed to the gate and looked into the compound.

A ruddy glow coming through a ragged gap in the ruin he had been seeking showed the black forms of the Gugus he had been following walking up the road to the old sugar central.

He waited until they had disappeared inside the building, then slipped through the gate and, bearing off to the right, half-circled the ruin, coming up to the crumbling walls on the northern side where he halted and listened. The roar of the river drowned out any other sound, and he crept along the side of the wall to a gap where a window had been torn out or had fallen. Through this hole he climbed and dropped to the floor below, which was littered with bagasse left by the old sugar mill. Fortunately for him the shredded cane, strewn thick over the boards, made a silent carpet over which he could walk without a sound.

A few steps took him to a broken door from which he could see the interior of the old shed once occupied by the boilers, sugar-kettles and vacuum pans of the plant. It was now empty, save for a score or more figures gathered about a fire in the center of the room.

The thunder of the river at his back, and the drumming of the rain on the galvanized iron roof of the building prevented his hearing what was going on at the fire and he looked about for an opportunity to get nearer. The rusted frame of a boiler not far away offered refuge. Dropping on his hands and knees he crawled through the shadows till he was within hearing of the group around the fire, but entirely concealed from view. A small hole in the side of the boiler, through which he could peep without fear of being seen, enabled him to see all that was going on around the fire.

He fitted his eye to the hole just in time to see a fresh party enter through the opposite door. There were half a dozen of them, each man bearing a bundle of bamboo.

THE bamboo was tossed down near the fire and, drawing their bolos, several of the natives fell to work upon the cane. From time to time fresh fuel was flung on the fire, and by the light of the leaping flames the work went swiftly on. Soon Harry was able to see what was being done. The natives were constructing a framework of green bamboo. The thing grew under their hands, took form — and Harry turned sick. They were building a narrow cage, a cage that would be just wide enough to hold a screaming, writhing man who could not escape the blistering heat and smoke of the slow fire that would be burning beneath him.

And there was no question in Harry's mind who that victim would be. In the horror that froze his blood there was mingled a throb of hope. He knew, now, that Charlie was still alive, and so long as he was alive there was a chance that he might be saved.

From the compound outside came the trampling of feet. The subdued muttering of the men around the fire died down, and Harry saw Paulita, accompanied by Don Manuel and a large Tagal he recognized at once as the ferryman, Sapadio, come through the doorway and walk rapidly toward the others. Their coming was greeted by a renewed outburst of subdued chattering. Some one threw a fresh armful of fuel on the fire and the flames flared up, lighting the interior of the old building with a ruddy glow.

Paulita flung off the cape of palm-fronds she had worn as protection from the rain, and, without any attempt to lower her voice, spoke.

"The *teniente*," she said, imperiously. "Bring him here at once."

There was a surge of the crowd at her words, and Harry saw a large bundle on the floor on the farther side of the flames. Two of the men bent and, with a flash of their bolos, severed the rope that bound the bundle, and Lieutenant Carr, his ankles bound together, his hands strapped behind his back, was lifted to his feet.

"Ah, *mi amigo!*" cried Paulita, going toward him. "You are wet and cold. Soon you shall be warmed and dried by our fire—oh, so hot you will be!"

Charlie's clothing was torn and clung, soaked, to his body, blood flowed from a cut over his right temple, but the old careless' audacity that Harry loved still showed in his manner and speech.

"If you want to talk to me you'll have to speak English," he said coolly. "I can't understand the mongrel Spanish you use."

Surprized out of her egoistical complacency, Paulita cowered back against her father's side. Harry, watching, gave full, if silent, approval. His brother was cured of his infatuation for the half-breed, and the girl had just realized it.

But Charlie was not looking at the girl. His eyes on Don Manuel, he spoke in slow Spanish, making each word count.

"You listen to me," he said. "You may be going to kill me. You would better move fast. My brother, Sergeant Carr, knows where I am. He knows all your plans. He knows that you, Don Manuel, are head of the Katipunan. He knows the pass-words and signs of your society. Macabeebe spies are all around you. Kill me if you like, but you'll pay a life for every drop of blood of mine you draw."

As he spoke the girl had crouched lower and lower, as if each word had been a blow, but when he had ceased speaking she uncoiled like a released spring. Screaming, she flung herself at him, tearing at his face with her long nails.

"He lies!" she shrieked. "His brother knows nothing. They are both fools! But we'll draw no blood. The cage!"

She turned to the bolo-men and repeated: "The cage! Put him in the bamboo cage! Let him feel the fire crawling up his legs."

There was a rush of natives, and Charles disappeared in a vortex of brown humanity. The sergeant knew that to interfere then would mean quick death for his brother.

Swiftly and silently, Harry began backing away along the side of the rusty boiler, and, taking advantage of the struggle that was going on at the fire, raced lightly across the bagasse-strewn floor, got through the window, and, without a pause, made for the open road.

Behind him in the go-down he could hear the hoarse shouts of the men, and the shrill, high crescendos of Paulita giving orders.

He was banking on his knowledge of the savage Tagal character. Although they were at least fifty to one, he knew that, left alone, they would not seriously injure their victim until they had played with him a while. An hour, Harry prayed that it might be two, could pretty safely be counted upon.

It had taken him more than an hour to make the traverse against the track from the village. Along the road, more dangerous but better going, he thought he could do the distance in little more than half that time. At the gate his carbine dropped into a deep ditch. He followed it with his cartridge-belt, stripped of its revolver and cartridges, thrust the revolver into his shirt front, the cartridges into his pocket, and started down the road with long, springy strides.

For the first half-mile or so the roar of the flooded river kept close at hand, guiding him on his way. Suddenly it came closer, and before he realized it he was plunging and splashing waist-deep in swirling water. The river had broken down the bank, carrying in its maw a part of the road-bed.

He struggled back to firmer land and tried to survey the situation. Around him, to his left, lay the black and silent paddies, impassable through their sticky slime unless he could find the path, which would take too long. Ahead was the break in the road, filled with the swirling flood. He had no means of telling how wide it might be, nor how fierce the current. To the right was the river itself.

Once in the grip of that mighty current he knew he would be doomed.

Just for a moment he hesitated, then drew his revolver and flung it into the boil of water ahead of him, out of reach of acquisitive Gugus, ripped off his leggings, took off his shoes, thrust them into his shirt and began wading cautiously out into the sunken road.

The waters clutched and twitched at him with strong, savage fingers, but the ground under his feet seemed firm enough. Soon the water was above his waist, another step and the ground failed him, and he was fighting for his life in the flood. Twice the current sucked him under, but he rose, his lungs bursting, to continue the fight for the farther edge of the break. A swirling tree-root swung against him in the dark, cutting a gash in his scalp, but he was hardly conscious of the hurt. At last he felt solid ground under his feet, struggled, gasping, back to the road, and pulled on his shoes again for the balance of the tramp back to the guard-house.

He had not the least idea how far he had swum, or how far ahead lay Number Four Outpost. He was wholly unarmed, and at the mercy of any bolo-men he might meet, but as soon as he had caught his breath again he went pelting recklessly down the road, feeling that every minute counted now if he was to save his brother's life.

His heart was pounding a fierce tattoo against the walls of his breast and his breath was coming in sobbing gasps when he heard the gruff challenge of Corporal Casey at Number Four Outpost, and knew his race was almost ended.

He staggered up to the corporal and dropped at the feet of that Irishman.

He was conscious of confused sounds. Friendly hands pawed at his bare arms and shoulders. He struggled to regain his self-control and came out of his daze to find the mouth of Casey's canteen glued to his lips as he swallowed great gulps of luke-warm tea.

He pushed the canteen from him, and sat up.

"The time?" he gasped. "How much time have I?"

"It's just gone one o'clock, sergeant," Casey answered. "What's happened?"

"The lieutenant—at the go-down. The Gugus——"

Harry was on his feet now, trying his legs.

"Got him, by ——!" cried the corporal.

"Yes," replied the sergeant.

And with that he was gone, dragging his weary feet as fast as he could through the mud to the guard-house, at the far end of the village street.

Old Sergeant Gavin jerked himself erect on his bamboo bunk at sight of the mud-bespattered, half-naked man who burst in upon him.

"Turn out the troop!" shouted Harry, giving the other no time to speak. "The Katipunan are holding the lieutenant in the go-down on the river."

Gavin grabbed his carbine and started, Harry behind him. Around to the troop's quarters they ran. There was an outbreak of shouts as Gavin's stentorian yell of "Turn out and fall in!" broke the silence of the shack.

Harry snatched a dry shirt from his own bunk, slipped another cartridge-belt about his waist, stole a revolver from another man's holster, fumbled in the dark until he found somebody's carbine and emerged fully equipped as the troop, with much cursing and trampling of feet, formed line in the mud.

Two dim lanterns lighted up the yard, flaring on the eager young faces under the campaign hats.

"First three sets of fours!" Harry shouted. "Scatter and nab all the native ponies you can find. The Gugus have caught Lieutenant Carr. They've got him in the old go-down in a bamboo cage——"

He choked, as the full extent of his brother's peril swept over him.

"Hustle like ——," he growled, gruffly, to hide his emotion.

And, though it seemed to him they would never get started, hustle the men did. In less than ten minutes they had returned, leading the kicking, squealing ponies.

Harry swung himself onto one of the sturdy little beasts.

"You're in charge, Gavin, until I get back," he said to the old sergeant. "Single file there—" to his picked dozen— "Mount and follow me."

THE rain had ceased and the night had closed in hot and sultry. The sodden, steaming earth itself breathed with desperate panting. To Harry the agonizing minutes dragged themselves into hours, days, weeks, it seemed, as the ponies, struggling in the mud through the paddies, made their slow but sure way toward the go-down.

At last the path through the rice-field turned into the river road, and the ponies broke into a quick trot.

Harry halted, wheeled, and ordered his men to dismount. Leaving the horses in charge of one man, he led the other men swiftly down the road to the go-down, as silent as so many ghosts.

At the wall surrounding the old building it took an almost superhuman effort for the sergeant to control himself and his haste to get to the go-down long enough to give instructions to his men. Reason told him that any precipitate action on his part would surely mean his brother's death.

Keeping this thought uppermost in his mind he gathered his troopers around him.

"We've got to surround the place," he explained in a whisper. "There's a gate around the curve, but I'll take the fence here. Brigham, you and Whitney will come with me. The rest of you will separate and find holes in the walls of the building. Get into your places as quickly as you can, but be sure that you're not discovered. Wait until I shout or open fire before you ease off. Clear the bamboo cage of whatever men are around it first, but remember that the lieutenant is in the cage. Make sure you don't hit him when you fire, and that you do hit a Gugu. We've got to keep a space cleared around the cage after the firing begins or somebody will run a bolo through——"

He didn't finish his sentence, but the men, understanding, answered with subdued grunts and moved off one by one.

Harry, followed by Whitney and Brigham, clambered over the wall and for the first time dared to look at the go-down. Through the many chinks in the ruined walls he could see fitful gleams of firelight, and drew a little sigh of relief. The blistering torture of the cage had not yet begun. That required a heaped bed of coals, not the bright flames that now lighted up the interior of the old building.

"We'll take no chances on being seen, boys," he said to the pair at his heels. "Down on your hands and knees, but look out and don't choke your carbine-barrels with mud."

And then, slowly, so that the men behind could keep in touch, and to give the others a chance to find their posts, he crawled toward the main entrance of the structure. He feared to find it guarded, but so intensely interested had the sentries grown in what was going on at the fire they had forsaken their posts, and Harry and his two men crawled right up to the broken door without being seen.

The bamboo cage had been completed and was standing close to the blaze. Through the bars, lashed with strips of green withes to withstand the heat, Harry could see his brother. Charlie seemed undaunted. He was smiling, and smiling as if he were amused, though the heat against him where he stood in the cage must have been terrible.

"Good egg!" whispered Brigham, a weazened cavalryman with twenty years service behind him. "How are you going to fetch him out of there, sarg?"

Harry choked. Until all his men were ready, it would not do to open fire, but Charlie's laughing indifference in the face of what seemed certain and awful death was almost too much for the sergeant.

Charlie was speaking, in clear, slow, untroubled Spanish.

"You might turn me around now," he said. "I'm pretty well browned on this side."

It was then Harry realized that the trial of the cage had begun. The fire had died down into a great bed of glowing coals, over which the savages were beginning to draw the cage. Charlie was lashed to the bars so he could not move hand or foot.

Harry whispered instructions to his two men. In obedience, Whitney slipped to the other side of the door and Brigham took the center.

"Pick your men," the sergeant told them as they took their places. "Remember, we must not let them crowd the cage. Get those nearest the cage first, and keep the cage clear. Also, pick off any you can that come toward us or try to escape."

He drew a fine sight on the white-shirted front of a brawny Tagal who, just back of the cage, was pushing it inch by inch nearer and over the fire.

"Ready!" he said.

With the word came the simultaneous crash of three shots.

The Tagal at the cage flung his arms above his head, spun about like a teetotum, and dropped. Don Manuel, who was poking a lighted bamboo-splinter through the bars at Charlie's face, fell sidewise into the fire, flinging the torch from him as he fell.

On the heels of the three shots came a ragged volley from different sides of the building. More Gugus fell and a wild outburst of yells filled the air.

Harry worked the bolt of his carbine as he had never worked it before in any rapid-fire test, pausing between shots just long enough to pick his man and send the bullet true. Whitney and Brigham stood shoulder to shoulder, aiming and firing as coolly as if on target range. Their magazines emptied, Harry tossed his carbine to Whitney.

"Load it," he said, and jerked his revolver from the holster to fire flush in the distorted face of a savage leaping at him through the gloom at his right.

The man crumpled and pitched backward.

By this time the ruined go-down was like a bit of the Pit, the fitful light of the fire gleaming on half-naked brown bodies as the natives milled about like stampeded cattle.

As Harry snatched his reloaded carbine from Whitney, natives collided with the cage and it crashed backward, away from the fire.

Harry shouted wildly, for the blood was pounding in his head, but he cuddled the butt of the carbine confidently against his cheek and blazed away again. It was impossible, by that time, to pick a target. The excitement was too intense, the racket too deafening, the swirling forms in the dim light moved too swiftly for that. But with Charlie flat on the ground, and out of the line of fire, Harry could pull his trigger with greater ease of mind.

His carbine was emptied and refilled for the second time. Once more he placed the weapon against his cheek when, out of the dancing, shrieking natives circling about the fire came a new figure.

It was Paulita.

Where she had been, or what she had been doing while the fight progressed, Harry could not guess, nor did he try. In the sudden flare of the firelight, for some one had thrown more fuel on the coals, she looked like the priestess of some hellish idol. Froth flecked her lips and gleamed on her brown skin like patches of snow.

She waved her arms and screamed something to the Gugus. Instantly, the noise subsided.

"The door!" she cried, in Tagal. "The door! Force the door!"

She pointed full at Harry.

"They're coming," he warned his companions. "Look out for the bolo!"

Before the words were out of his mouth the natives were upon them. He met the rush with a sputter of shots, conscious that other shots were being fired close at his side. And then he was engulfed in a torrent of dark bodies, gleaming eyes and flashing knives.

Pushed back from the door, he found himself fighting for his life with two Tagals in the dark. His carbine was useless at such close range. He dropped it, and managed to get his revolver loose and fired it from his hip through the open holster. The clutch on his throat relaxed and he fell backward in the mud.

When he got to his feet again the space around him was empty. In the glow at the doorway stood Whitney, trying to reload his shattered carbine. Bill Brigham was examining a cut across the back of his hand, the tears trickling down his mud-grimed face.

Between him and the fire stood Paulita, half-naked, her arms waving and her voice screaming encouragement to her remaining followers.

But the fight had gone out of the natives. Ringed in by rifles, two score of their companions dead before them, they hung back, cowering.

Suddenly she snatched from one of them a bolo and wheeled back toward the cage. Harry, using his carbine as a club to clear a path for himself through the natives, leaped after the woman. He took the fire at a bound and reached the cage as Paulita made her second thrust through the bars at the helpless lieutenant. Harry clubbed her on the shoulder with his gun.

She turned with a snarl, hurled the bolo into his face, and fled.

Although the sharp edge of the bolo had cut his right cheek to the bone, Harry was not conscious of any pain. Paulita's weapon was in his hand almost before it touched the ground, and he was chopping the withes that bound the bars of the cage. With the last of his strength he hauled the limp form of his brother from the wreckage. Then his head sagged and he slipped unconscious to the floor.

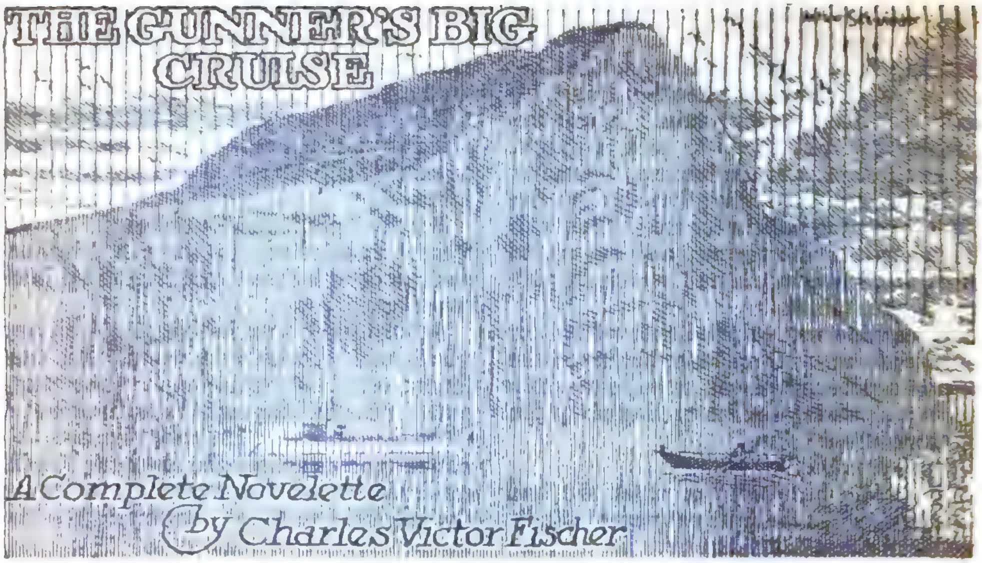
When he came to himself Bill Brigham's grinning face was the first thing he saw. Harry drank and sat up. A short distance away was Charlie, looking pale and shaky, but alive and smiling.

"Did we smash 'em?" asked the sergeant.

"Well, I guess we did," said Bill. "Th' ain't goin' to be no more Exalted and Honorable Union in these parts for some time to come, I reckon."

"Where's Paulita?" Harry asked, when he had digested that reply, for his head still swam.

"She must be about to Baliuag by this time," Bill answered. "After she throwed that bolo into your face she run to the bank o' the river and it caved in with her. She won't bother no white *soldados* no more."



THE GUNNER'S BIG CRUISE

A Complete Novelette

by Charles Victor Fischer

Author of "Whose Command?" "Baby Depth Bombs," etc.

ALONG with their ham and eggs, pork chops and fried rabbit, the naval radio operators of the Fog Rock station had a *boat* for breakfast that morning. These nine—eight bluejackets and one officer, the gunner—well, no; it wasn't a boat but a ship, to be exact, a yacht, they wanted. They had a boat, at least the use of one: Their commanding officer, "Blackie," allowed them unrestricted use of his motor-boat, the *Dolly Dean*, any time they felt the urge to run into Felgo on liberty.

But sea conditions on the Pacific would change, sometimes, during the forty-mile run between Felgo and Fog Rock; and the *Dolly Dean*, while a speedy, docile little girl on a smooth sea, was anything but that when things became choppy, she being only a twenty-foot open boat. They wanted a cabin cruiser, sixty feet long and nine feet of beam, with an engine of one hundred horse-power capable of developing a speed of fifteen to twenty knots, and with a capacity of twenty persons.

The germ of this nightmare had sprouted in the minds of three of them, in the afternoon of the day before. "Simple" Werner, "Rusty" Hannigan and "Wildflower" Pearson, in Felgo for a day's frolic, had clapped eyes on such a craft. On learning that she was for sale these three tars had boarded and inspected her—not so much with an idea of buying her as to feast their sailors' eyes on her, to glut themselves with the magnificence of her—give them something to dream of.

The *Wild Oats* was her name. She was all she looked, her owner, a wealthy lumberman's son named Walt Green, had assured them—sixty feet of glossy black symmetry, with an ideal combination of comfort and speed and durability. He had no further use for her; his father, old Walt Green, was giving him a new, bigger and faster boat on his twenty-third birthday. He would let the *Wild Oats* go for five thousand dollars.

The three gobs—who were all in flashy civilian clothes—had batted their eyes and set their jaws. Five thousand, eh? Hm-m-m-m. Yes, that was rock-bottom price—young Walt Green would blow her up rather than take a nickel less. Well, they would think it over.

They had *shouted* it over. That night, all the way back to Fog Rock, pounding, tossing, splashing through forty miles of moonlit waves, in the *Dolly Dean's* cockpit they had yelled. They were drunk with desire. It was *Wild Oats, Wild Oats*, all the way out. They put into Fog Rock's landing-cove at midnight, drenched, cold and voiceless.

Hence the boat, along with the ham and

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eggs, pork chops and fried rabbit that morning. The three returned tars gave no one else seated at the long table a chance to get a word in. In husky, cracked tones they talked incessantly. Wildflower, who was a machinist's mate, dilating on that one hundred horse-power, six-cylinder Standard motor, with the eight-inch cylinders, a ten-inch stroke, and that made six hundred revolutions a minute—a type he knew better than he knew his pay-number, from his experience on the one-hundred-and-ten-foot submarine chasers; while Rusty and Simple played heavy on the *Wild Oats'* magnificence as a whole—her sharp, clean-cut, flaring lines; the compactness and efficiency of her splendid equipment; the elaborate fittings and furnishings of her unbelievably spacious cabin.

"But where's the five thousand smacks comin' from?" the cook, "Beans," managed to interject finally.

"She's got a radio outfit that'll knock your eyes out," Rusty hastened to ramble on. "Little half a K. W. Marconi panel transmitter, with a wave-changer an' everything; an' two receivers, one for arcs and one for sparks."

"Rusty and I copied Great Lakes on her," Simple took it up—"while Wildflower was aft kissin' the engine. You guys ought to take one look inside of her cabin—talk about velvet and mahogany!"

"She's a floating palace!" Wildflower chimed along. "She's got an independent lighting outfit; little two-and-a-half-horse generating set, with a storage battery. She's got everything!"

"But the five thousand boohoos!" Beans repeated.

"I call that a sensible question," spoke up "Graveyard" Wilton, a chief eletrician, who sat over in a corner away from the table. Graveyard was married, lived in a bungalow, hence didn't eat with the gang.

There was a lengthy silence, during which Simple, Rusty and Wildflower looked vaguely at one another. Finally Wildflower took the lead.

"If we all dig—" he began.

"Dig what, guano?" Beans interrupted.

"To —— with you!" Wildflower snapped, and went on: "I've got seven hundred dollars in the Felgo First National; Rusty's got six seventy-five; Simp's got four hundred."

With which Wildy produced a notebook and pencil, and began writing down these amounts.

"I'll have five hundred next pay-day," responded "Smoky" Fenn—"if I stay decent."

"An' if I'm lucky enough to collect the ten dollars Beans owes me," announced "Sleepy" Milligan, "I'll have five hundred."

"Put me down for two hundred and fifty in liberty bonds," supplemented "Salvation" Peters.

"A dollar an' fifteen cents," from Beans.

"To —— with you!" Wildflower snapped again. "A rum-hound like you never has got any kale. How about you, chief?" he broke off to Graveyard.

Graveyard's lean, homely face worked queerly.

"Fat chance," he grinned. "Ever see a married man with any money? A man with a wiff, Wildy, is no better off than a rum-hound. The wiff, the wiff, the wiff, my boy. She gets all mine."

While Wildflower was totaling up, his shipmates about the long table chewed hard on fried rabbit and pork chops, the while casting furtive glances at their commanding officer, Blackie, who up to now had been an amused listener. Wildflower deliberated in his count, in the hope that Blackie would speak up. But the gunner's black eyes remained fixed on his plate, his strong, fine features unchanging. At length Wildflower looked up.

"How about it, gunner? We've got over three thousand."

Now it was generally supposed that the gunner must have a few thousand dollars. He was a clean, moderate liver, had no dependent relatives, was moored with no petticoat strings.

"Fellows," he laughed, "I've had my eye on that baby for over a year. All of you together don't want the *Wild Oats* more than I do. But all I can help the cause along with is just as much as I can get for the *Dolly Dean*—about eight hundred dollars. That's my limit.

"You see," he explained, noting their puzzled looks, "I sunk every dollar I had about a week ago—in oil. It looked like a good thing and I took a chance. Sorry I did, now; for I wish we could buy that *Wild Oats*. But I'm flat broke, and that's that."

Painful silence, long faces.

"Tell yuh'se what!"

All eyes turned on Beans, whose freckled face was red with inspiration.

"It's a cinch!" he began unfolding. "Without sayin' a word about the six or eight hundred chickens, ducks an' geese on this rock, an' also the thousands of rabbits—how about the guano? No, I ain't tryin' to be funny! There's shiploads of guano on this island, an' that stuff's worth money! We got wheelbarrows an' shovels. What more do yuh'se want? I say all hands get out an' gather guano!"

THE idea didn't get to them particularly. They did lay plans, however, along other lines of endeavor. First they declared a general round-up of the poultry scattered wild over the island. These belonged to the radio mess—being the progeny of a basketful of chicks, ducklings and goslings that Graveyard had, years before in one of his younger and wilder days, brought back from Felgo. That basketful had multiplied into something like six hundred squawkers. These could be gathered up and sold to some dealer in Felgo.

Then there were a few thousand rabbits on the island—pure white, black, brown, speckled, brindled. No one knew the origin of these, but it was supposed that some of the early lighthouse people had turned loose a few. Fog Rock could well dispense with most of these, for of late they had been increasing at an alarming rate. Like the poultry, these would be turned into cash.

War was declared on the sea-lions. This meant a great deal of work for a very little money; skinning the animals was a laborious and disgusting task, and the pelts wouldn't bring much—but "Every little bit helps," was the slogan now. Also there would be much fishing and gathering of abalones and mussels from now on—commodities for which there was always an open market.

They would get the *Wild Oats* if they had to strip the Rock!

It was a warm, balmy morning, with a clear blue sky and little wind. Here and there a sharp-nosed sea-lion or a plunging porpoise showed above the surface. An ideal morning to run in to Felgo in the *Dolly Dean*, decided Blackie. So he got Beans to pack him a lunch, and away he went.

The skipper of Fog Rock had a full day's work ahead of him in Felgo. In the main his assignment comprised negotiating for the sale of some six hundred fowls, a few thousand rabbits, an indefinite number of sea-lions' pelts, and one motor-launch, the *Dolly Dean*. Also he was to get wholesale prices on fish, abalones and mussels. But most important of all, he must first get the ear of that millionaire's boy, Walt Green, and try to plant a holder on the *Wild Oats*; for this he had five hundred dollars in his pocket—all the cash on the Rock.

IT WAS a little after noon when Blackie swung the *Dolly Dean* alongside of the beautiful *Wild Oats*, anchored off the yacht club pier in Felgo Bay.

She was a picture to hold the eye of any boat-lover, this *Wild Oats*. She was sharp and concaved in the bows, while aft her sides bulged round and wide from cockpit coaming to water-line. She had a very short, high forecastle that terminated at the forward bulkhead of her cabin. This cabin—which was the bridge, wheelhouse, radio-room and saloon all in one—ran eighteen feet fore-and-aft and nine feet athwartships. Aft was a small open cockpit, rounded into her stern; and between this and the cabin was the engine-room. Aloft she carried an antenna of five wires, swung from the truck of her forty-foot mast down to the bowsprit; this gave a forward thrust, a dashing agressiveness to her sharp flaring lines.

A small wiry Filipino lad of about eighteen—her crew—caught Blackie's bow-line and made it fast to a deck cleat. As the gunner jumped aboard, a young fellow, of medium height, well-formed, dressed in light flannels, emerged from the cabin and walked aft to meet him. This was the man Blackie was gunning for—Walt Green. He had a ruddy, pleasing face, wavy blond hair that needed trimming and combing, and a pair of blue eyes that seemed to find the world all right. It was obvious to Blackie that young Walt Green wasn't worrying over old Walt Green's millions.

"I know you," the youngster said, smiling and reaching out to shake. "You're the skipper of Fog Rock. And—" as they shook hands—"I'd bet the *Wild Oats* against your little *Dolly Dean*—if I could—that you're here to tell me I've been horning in on Fog Rock's receiving. I did open up with my spark out there the other night, but——"

"You'd bet what?"

"If I could, I said."

"Oh." And Blackie smiled. "Well I wish you could. I'd win. No, you haven't been troubling my gang. I'm here on a different errand." And Blackie explained the situation.

"What, those three fellows that were aboard yesterday?" young Green exclaimed. "They were bluejackets from Fog Rock? By George, they didn't say so! They weren't in uniform. They didn't come alongside in your *Dolly Dean;* some Felgo fisherman brought 'em."

Blackie laughed.

"Why, I suppose they came aboard merely to rubber at things, and figured if they come in uniform they'd get the rush."

"The rush!" Green scowled. "From me? Man, I wore a uniform myself in the war. I'm only a kid, but I was in France just the same. But say—hang it, skipper, this is too bad! I didn't know Fog Rock wanted her. How was I to know they were Fog Rock men? I had them lined up for three tinhorns. The worst of it is I've got her sold now."

Blackie's handsome smile gave way to a frown.

"Sold?"

"Why, yes. Two fellows from down the coast named Wharton and Berg gave me a thousand dollars as a deposit last night. They're in the cabin now."

"Come in and meet them. Have a little drink."

Blackie shook his head.

"Thanks," he grinned; "but on top of such a disappointment, I'm afraid if I got started I'd go loony. I'd likely wind up in Washington, demanding an audience with the Secretary of the Navy. And you can't blame me for not caring to shake hands with the two fellows that beat my gang to it."

"Hardly," Green answered, his roving blue eyes admiring the six feet of splendid manhood between the gold braid on the gunner's cap and the shine on his shoes. "How much do you weigh, skipper?"

"And in that case— Me? About a hundred and eighty. In that case I might as well get back and break the sad news. I'll have a red-eyed gang on my hands tonight. Whenever they're balked of anything they take it out on one another."

"Why not buy some other boat?"

"Not that gang! They want the *Wild Oats!*"

Blackie's voice, considerably above a whisper, brought two faces to the cabin doorway. To be exact, a face and a half. The doorway was only wide enough for one, and the fellow behind could just look over the other's shoulder; all Blackie could see of him was a crop of bushy brown hair, a narrow slanting forehead, dark, squinting eyes and heavy eyebrows that met, a nose that hooked slightly over a tuft of black on a thick upper lip—the face of one of those human buzzards that haunt the shady corners and devious byways in quest of suckers. The man in front was tall, gaunt, about forty, had high, sharp features and small, close-set eyes; he was something between a pickpocket and a cutthroat, adjudged Blackie.

The gunner felt no pull toward either of them. He gave them a momentary scrutiny then turned his back. He looked at Green and smiled. Blackie was puzzled. An honest man having dealings with that pair was beyond his ken—the thousand dollars deposit notwithstanding. However, it was none of his business. He stooped and threw the *Dolly Dean's* painter off the cleat.

"Why not take a ride with us, skipper?" prompted Green. "I'm taking these fellows out for a little cruise—giving them the run of things, you know. You can leave your *Dolly Dean* over at the boat-club landing."

"Thanks," Blackie grinned; "but as long as we can't have her, the less I see of her the better."

With which he jumped down into the *Dolly Dean's* cockpit.

"Well, by George, skipper, I'm sorry. But——"

The noise of the *Dolly Dean's* engine drowned Green's voice. With one hand against the little yacht's side, Blackie pushed her off. He threw over the wheel and she heeled over, circling gracefully round the bow of the *Wild Oats* and pointing seaward.

"Drop off at the Rock sometime, lad, and see us," Blackie shouted back.

ON THE way out to the Rock, Blackie decided not to apprize his gang of the unfortunate turn of things till the next morning. His reason for this was that he didn't feel like sitting up till midnight, squashing arguments. And just now, nothing would more quickly precipitate an argument in that gang than the information that they had lost out on the *Wild Oats*. This particularly with regard to Rusty and Beans. A tangling of tails between this pair was long overdue. Beans would pounce upon the opportunity to poke fun at Rusty, for having brought back such a nightmare; and Rusty was only praying for an excuse to sail in and mix it with Beans. Beans was freckled, Rusty red-headed; both were Irish. It would be Rusty and Beans all over the Rock. And the skipper of Fog Rock thought too much of his gang to want to see any of them hurt.

So he made the return trip at half-speed. It was after sunset when he came in sight of the gigantic, pyramidal Fog Rock, and the moon and stars were out when he nosed the *Dolly Dean* into the deep rock-walled cove and let her glide silently into her boat-house.

After putting away and securing his boat, the gunner mounted the steep flight of stairs to the top of the bluff overlooking the cove, then set out for his shack, the "dog house," on the south end of the island. He gave the radio station a wide berth. Let them dream tonight. Tomorrow, the awakening.

NEARING two o'clock, it was, when Blackie was awakened by the clattering of the telephone on the table beside his bed. They had a simple, one-wire system, connecting the gunner's shack with the radio-office. A call at this hour was unusual; the operator on watch must be in trouble, thought Blackie, as he reached up and switched on his overhead reading-light.

"Hello, gunner. This is Rusty," came the voice from the other end. "I knew you was back, 'cause one of the lighthouse gang was in a while ago and told me he saw a light in your shack early last night. Say, I'm in a —— of a pickle, sir."

"Yes?"

"About ten minutes ago," Rusty went on, "some ship opens up with a high-frequency spark—she's on a short wave length, about four hundred meters—and spelled out *S. O. S. Blue Rock*. That's all she sent, sir. And she sent it just once."

"What, no sign? no call letters?" Blackie was wide awake now. "She just made *S. O. S. Blue Rock?*"

"That's all. —— of a way to send an S. O. S., eh? It was rotten sending; sounded like some one had his foot on the key. But she came in strong, and that's what she sent—*S. O. S. Blue Rock*."

"But, Blue Rock! Why, Rusty, no ships ever pass there!"

"I know, sir. That's what had me guessin'. I opens right up, of course, with *C. Q.*,* and a string of dee-dee-da-da-ditdits.† But nothin' doin'; she don't come back. So I calls Felgo; he ain't heard a thing. I tries the *Empress;* it went over her head too. I gives the *Northern Pacific* a shake; he's got the crust to tell me I was dreamin'. But I tell you, gunner, I heard her! It was punk sending, but I made out just that—*S. O. S. Blue Rock*."

Blackie thought a while.

"Tell you what you do, Rusty," he said finally; "make out a message to the commandant in Felgo, reporting just what you heard, giving time, details, and sign it Fog Rock. Shoot it right through to Felgo. That's all I can see to do."

"All right, sir."

And as Blackie was about to hand up, Rusty broke off into—

"How about the *Wild Oats*, gunner?"

Blackie chuckled for a moment. Then—

"I'll tell you all about it in the morning."

With which he hung up.

"Blue Rock!" Blackie muttered, sitting on the edge of the bed pulling on his socks.

Blue Rock was nearly thirty miles north of Fog Rock. It was nothing more than a huge, ovate bulge of blue-gray rock, about a mile in circumference. It was uninhabited, no light was maintained there, for the rock was well known and presented no danger to navigation. Ships rarely passed there; those plying in and out of Felgo passed to the south of Fog Rock.

Blackie dressed hurriedly and left his shack, setting out over the long, sinuous path that wound and twisted along the island's eastern shore to the landing-cove on the north. It was clear, starry, but chilly, and the gunner broke into a run.

In a few minutes he was down in the *Dolly Dean's* boat-house. He took on gas, fresh water, oiled the engine. Then with a push against the side of the boat-house he sent the long, trim little craft gliding out over the moonlit water of the cove.

An unearthly roar echoed across the deep, rock-walled inlet, and a score of howling, groaning sea-lions plunged from the low crags and ledges, as the doughty little *Dolly*

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*General Call. † Interrogation point. Dot-dot-dash-dash-dot-dot.

Dean's engine rumbled, and she went streaking for the entrance. A few angry gulls screamed from the high, jutting cliffs. But to the gunner it was all like a momentary burst of sound hurled through the window of a speeding railroad train.

Clearing the cove, Blackie switched the light on the compass, and steadied her on north. From the cockpit locker he rummaged forth his rubber coat and sou'wester—for the *Dolly Dean* was not a "dry boat" when she was eating up miles. For several minutes he tuned and adjusted spark and gas, till the piston strokes blended into a hum, and the *Dolly Dean* was leaping over the long westerly ground-swell with those gliding, grayhound bounds for which she was justly famous. Then the gunner put up the wind-shield, lighted a cigaret and sat back at the steering wheel to puff and dream away thirty miles.

It was a daylight night. Billions of stars dotted the cloudless sky. The great white moon paved the shimmering water with a broad pathway of silver that stretched away from the *Dolly Dean* to the westward. Broadway on the Pacific.

Miles of water raced by. Indeed, at times she seemed to be flying, so lightly did she skim over the gleaming ridges of swell. She was just about doing her prettiest—fifteen knots. Her bow was high out of the water, her stern low—for at that speed her center of gravity was well back in her after half. Now and then she dipped, clove a wavelet, throwing back a shower of spray, some of which fell inside of the wind-shield and put out the gunner's cigaret, making him reach for another.

He kept a wary eye astern, on the oscillating streak of white that issued from the lofty lighthouse—Fog Rock Light. As he drew away he observed that the bearing of the light shifted to the eastward; which meant that the westerly swell and current were pushing him sidewise, seaward. He didn't want to go to northern Siberia, but to Blue Rock, thirty miles dead north. He changed his course to a point east of north.

What could a ship be doing at Blue Rock, he wondered. Had she struck? And sunk, before her radio operator could finish sending the distress signal? Possibly. But in every wreck Blackie had ever heard of there had been at least time to send S. O. S., the ship's position, and her call letters. Then he recalled Rusty's remark about the bad sending, "sounded like some one had his foot on the key." Perhaps the operator on watch had been hurt, knocked out, maybe killed, in the crash; and some one else aboard, who knew the code, had sent that *S. O. S. Blue Rock*. But why so short and snappy about it? Dynamo room flooded, perhaps; supply shut off.

"And perhaps—" And the gunner laughed—"perhaps some young Marconi, one of those radio amateurs over on the mainland, is making —— fools out of the *Dolly Dean* and the skipper of Fog Rock. But we've got to see it through, little lady."

She dipped her cutwater and threw him back a cold, wet slap.

"You're fresh as ——, when you're putting fifteen knots under your tail, eh?" he chuckled, and then fell silent.

An hour passed. Fog Rock Light grew dimmer and dimmer, till at last he could no longer distinguish it from the stars. The going was good. She steered with one finger.

Blackie grew drowsy. The low, monotonous hum of the engine, the swishing murmur of the racing water would grow fainter and fainter, at times, till he was dozing in spite of himself. But always the *Dolly Dean* would wake him with one of those cold, gusty slaps. He would sit up, dash a hand across his wet face, blink at the compass-card, give her a spoke of the wheel, all alertness for a few moments, till she was again steady on north by east, then relax—and the next moment he was dozing again.

AT THREE THIRTY Blackie shook the cobwebs out of his head and got himself in hand. It was time. An hour and a half under way, he had covered about twenty-three miles. He must now keep a weather eye ahead. If the moon were dead ahead, he mused, he should even now be able to see Blue Rock. On the other hand, if a ship had been wrecked there lights would be showing. Even if she had gone down—some of her survivors would have got ashore, and started fires.

But more minutes, more miles raced by and he saw no lights ahead, nor off either bow—nothing but stars, and the silvery crests of the long billowy swells. Came three forty-five—ten minutes to four. Nothing. Blackie scratched the back of his neck.

And while he was doing that Gunner Blackie received a jolt that well-nigh jarred him apart, body from soul. There was a violent thud; something impacted with the *Dolly Dean* on her port bow. So terrific a smash was it that her bow end rose clear of the water, and, when she tumbled over and went plunging on, rolling till her gunwales were awash, she was forty-five degrees off her course—heading eastward.

Blackie knew in the instant that it wasn't a rock. It was not a hard, solid crash, but a dull thud. But there was force enough behind it, whatever it was, to send the gunner sprawling on the wet cockpit deck. And then, as he scrambled to his feet and looked astern, he saw the nigger in the water. There he was, crossing Broadway—a huge, glistening black porpoise.

Down it went. Up it came. Down again, up again, it plunged across the broad avenue of silver and was swallowed in the shadows.

Blackie was back at the wheel, with his left hand bringing her back on her course, while with his right he reached out and brought forth a loaded Colt from the cockpit locker. Then, leaning outboard over the port gunwale, he saw it again, that huge black bulge on the water. It was about ten yards away, and making at right angles for the *Dolly Dean*.

Porp. wanted to play. Blackie didn't. He waited, standing, his left hand on the wheel, the gun in his right, till the big animal was within a boat-length. Then—

"To —— with you!" he shouted, and threw the helm hard over.

She answered, heeling over till the water rushed over the cockpit coaming, throwing her stern end round into Porp's. nose. In the same instant Blackie blazed away as fast as he could work the trigger, till the gun was empty.

But, oh! What a bonehead! Too late, Blackie saw it. In trying to swerve clear he threw the racing propeller right into the animal's nose. The sudden thunderous racing of the engine—it was roaring like a runaway locomotive—told him what had happened. He reached down and shut off the gas. Then he jumped aft, leaned over the stern and plunged his hand deep down into the water below the rudder. His fingers closed over a propeller-blade. The propeller spun loosely. The shaft was broken.

It was one on the gunner. And sitting there on the gunwale seat, waiting for her to drift out her momentum, Blackie had to admit it. The predicament called for a cigaret. There was nothing else to do now but sit back and think things over. He didn't know where he was; somewhere near Blue Rock, but whether east or west of it he would have to wait till daylight to find out.

He got up after a while and threw over the anchor; it took nearly all the line he had aboard to reach bottom. Then he threw himself down on the gunwale seat—there was an inch of water on the cockpit deck—to try for some sleep.

Never had Blackie dreamed such a crazy dream. He was running, galloping madly, frantically, over a moonlit path of silvery water. He was chasing the *Wild Oats*—she not far ahead of him, tearing along at a breakneck lick, throwing great gushy splashes of spray back over him. For miles and miles he galloped, overhauling her steadily but ever so slowly. He gained and gained, till at last, reaching out, he could just touch her brass taffrail with his finger tips. Another spurt and she was his—the beautiful *Wild Oats*, the pride and the envy of Felgo Bay, *his own!*

Then some one from behind took a handful of his collar and jerked him back. It was a powerful grip that held him, but after several minutes of struggling he succeeded in shaking it off. And again he went galloping after the *Wild Oats*.

Again he all but had her, when that hand reached out from behind and yanked him back. There was red in Blackie's eyes now, and white wrath in his head. He shook off the hand that gripped his scruff, then whirled, determined to settle this bird's hash then and there, once and for all.

Round and round on the moonlit water they danced. With all the mighty shoulder-power that was his Blackie swung right and left, but could hit nothing but air. This was puzzling. But more so were the antics of his adversary. Whoever he was, he made no attempt to hit back; all he did was dance, dance, dance, keeping always behind him, and cackle in his ear, "Blackie! Blackie! Blackie!" Blackie tried everything he knew of fist-lore—every feint and dodge and stratagem. But he could not get this bird in front of him. This bird was one too many for him.

Meanwhile there was the *Wild Oats*, far down the silvery lane, racing toward the moon. If he didn't go galloping after her, he'd lose her. But he couldn't run away from a fight!

And then, just by luck, he caught the son-of-a-sea-cook, pivoted and caught him in both hands, by the neck. Blackie crunched his teeth, dug his thumbs deep into that throat and shook, shook, shook, till he heard teeth rattle—when, lo and behold—the head he was shaking was that of himself—the teeth he heard rattling were his own! He was looking at himself!

* * *

BLACKIE woke up on the wet cockpit deck. He sat up, rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and blinked over the gunwale. Gray streaks in the east told him it was just before dawn. Moon and stars were gone; to the north, west and south all was blackness. He stood up, and for several minutes worked his arms and legs, for he was stiff and full of kinks. At length, somewhat limbered up, he sat down on the gunwale seat and lighted a cigaret. He felt wofully in need of a cup of good thick coffee. He was hungry, too, more hard luck.

A strong easterly current was still running; the *Dolly Dean* was pulling hard at her anchor-line, which stretched away taut over the bow.

But where was he? That was it. Where was Blue Rock—to the eastward or westward? Not much to the north or south—of that he was positive; for he had been under way two hours, and must have covered just about thirty miles. If the rock lay to the westward, he could break out the oars and pull for it; the current would help. But if he was already west of it, then that anchor would stay right on the bottom till the current changed. For only a lunatic would attempt single-handed to pull a heavy motor-launch against that powerful drag.

Slowly the sky in the east brightened. Yet strain as he would, Blackie could make out nothing; not a speck showed on the blurred horizon, save here and there a momentary rise of the sea. Then the blackness in the west gave way to dark gray, and the horizon in that direction became discernible.

Blackie was reaching for his binoculars, which hung beside the compass, when a voice broke on his ears, wild, weird, screeching, and so close that it made him jump. But it was only an outbound seagull.

A white bird. A good sign. And the fact that it was outbound caused hope to surge. Where else could the bird be heading for but Blue Rock?

Consulting the compass, he watched the bird, gaging its direction of flight. He almost shouted hooray, as he observed that it pointed nearly due west. He must be directly east of Blue Rock. He had the current with him!

Elbows on the gunwale he looked through the glasses in the direction the gull had taken. There it was. There was no mistaking that great black bulge on the water for anything other than what it was, a mountainous rock. It was only about a mile to the west of him. And in another minute he was able to see it with the naked eye.

Blackie hoisted the anchor, allowing the *Dolly Dean* to drift with the current. But she drifted too slow to suit him. Breakfast was the big idea with him. Mussels, baked over a driftwood fire, wasn't the worst feed a man ever squatted to. He was hungry enough to eat dog! So he broke out and shipped the oars in the row-locks, reversed the steering-seat, and sat down to pull for Blue Rock.

Daylight broke. The sun flared up, scattering the low-hanging mists. Overhead scores of gulls cawed and screamed; while the deep, sonorous groans and roars that came to Blackie told him that Fog Rock didn't have a monopoly on sea-lions.

Blackie put beef behind those oars and, with the current helping, sent the *Dolly Dean* along at a lively lick. He stopped rowing, presently, and twisted in his seat for a look over his shoulder. The towering mass of rock was now not more than five hundred yards distant. In the glare of the rising sun it shone and glittered like a gigantic nugget of gold, from which a fellow might with an ax chop off chunks to his heart's content.

But where was that ship? Not on this side of the rock. Nor was there a human being in sight. Through his binoculars Blackie scanned the high crags and cliffs; he saw only gulls, myriads of them. Then beginning at the south end, he trained the glasses down along the water's edge, moving them slowly to the right, searching each ledge and cove thoroughly. Nothing but sea-lions, for a way, till his glasses came to rest on a spot about midway between northern and southern ends. And there he held them.

"Well, I'll be ——!" he muttered.

As snug as a bug in a rug, close in against the wall of rock, nestled the *Wild Oats.*

That made two on the gunner.

Riding gracefully at her anchor, on even keel, in what must be deep water, so sheer was the wall of rock beside her—the *Wild Oats* appeared anything but a ship in distress to Blackie. She was merely anchored in there—taking things easy. Training the glasses fore and aft over the beautiful craft's deck, Blackie could see no sign of life on her. Apparently young Walt Green and his company were sleeping off a "night before." Brains slightly fossilized from too many last night.

So that was the how-come of that S. O. S.! And forthwith Blackie became a very much peeved gunner. Who wouldn't boil up?—after being deprived of a whole night's sleep—not to say a word of the damage to his boat—by a whimsical whipper-snapper of a millionaire's brat?

"All right, Mr. Walt Green, junior," growled the gunner, "you probably thought you were pulling a deep one when you sent that S. O. S. But you'll buy the *Dolly Dean* a new propeller shaft, or I'm not the skipper of Fog Rock!"

Cool, normal, Blackie had the strength of three ordinary men. Wo to the ox that tackled him when his ire was up! He now drove the *Dolly Dean* through the water as if she were only a light skiff. In not many minutes the growls and yelps of the sea-lions were roaring in his ears, and he could see the rock over his head. Within ten yards of the *Wild Oats* he boated his oars, and then stepped up in the bow, where he stood by to fend off the *Dolly Dean* as she glided alongside.

Catching hold of a deck cleat aft near the yacht's cockpit, Blackie made fast his painter. Still no sign of life aboard her. Leaning over, looking down into the cockpit he saw something on deck bundled in a blanket. A pair of shoes and ankles protruded. Blackie was about to let out a he-man hail, when he saw that those ankles were bound with rope.

Again—

"Well, I'll be ——!" But below a whisper this time.

Blackie got that Colt in hand, loaded it, the while keeping his eyes peeled along the deck of the *Wild Oats*. If there were others aboard they must be forward in the cabin. There was no one in the engine-room, into which he could see through the opening that led to this from the cockpit. Dropping the gun into his coat pocket he crawled over on to the yacht and down into the cockpit.

A dusky brown face frowned up at the gunner when he drew back the blanket—a broad face with large cheek-bones, a small flat nose and full lips. The eyes that blinked up at him were as black as his own. It was the little Filipino of the *Wild Oats*, "Aguinaldo," as the Felgo water-folk called him. Aguinaldo's frown dimmed and died, when he recognized the skipper of Fog Rock, and in its place came a grin that was wide and monkeyish.

Blackie produced his knife, tore away the blanket, and cut the lashings that bound the brown lad's wrists and ankles. While so doing the gunner's foremost thought was—

"Watch your step!"

Instinctively, as if half-expecting a shot, he cast a glance upward along the crags and crannies of the wall of rock that rose alongside. A quick search of the engine-room revealed no one. He hopped up on to the cockpit seat and looked forward over the engine-room hatch. He saw no one. The cabin door, twenty feet forward, was open. He dropped back on the cockpit deck and turned his gaze downward upon the little Filipino, who was slowly sitting up, rubbing first one numb, swollen wrist then the other.

"Who makum all tied up, lad?" questioned Blackie, lapsing into gob-Filipino pidgin-English.

Aguinaldo's grin changed to a scowl, and into his blinking black eyes came a mingling of wrath and alarm.

"*Sh-sh-sh!*" he hissed, rising shakily on his still numb legs. "You loog out!" he whispered. "This two —— fella in cabin he have the gun!"

"What two fella?"

"Come yestaday buy this boat *Wild Oats*. His name Wharton and Berg. He make me and Mist' Green all tied up *bocksock*."

"Why for?"

"I don't know, sur. He have the gun. Make us come to Blue Rock. They tie us all up *bocksock*."

"Where's Green?"

"In the cabin chair, sur, all tied up *bocksock*."

Blackie again hopped up onto the cockpit seat and looked over the top of the hatch at the cabin door. He had his gun in hand now. It was against Blackie's principles to be caught in a trap.

Just what was their game, he wondered. He remembered Green telling him they had handed over a thousand dollars as a deposit on the *Wild Oats*. And Green was to take them out on a trial cruise. It couldn't be that they were trying to steal the *Wild Oats;* they could never get away with it. No; they had a deeper motive. It might be a case of kidnaping. They might be holding young Green out here while accomplices of theirs in Felgo attempted to extract some of old Walt Green's seven-figure bank-roll. That must be it.

How young Green had managed to get off that *S. O. S. Blue Rock*, was another puzzler. Blackie would have liked to question further the little Filipino, standing behind him down in the cockpit, but didn't dare chance taking his eyes off the cabin door.

The gunner was in a quandary as to how to proceed. The two crooks were there in the cabin, only twenty feet away, and yet—He might step right in, gun in hand, master of the situation. Again, they might both be wide awake, with their guns handy; and a gun game in a nine by eighteen room didn't appeal—particularly with young Green sitting there in the chair helpless.

A noise floated to his ears. It was that rasping, hideous variety of snore that brings goose-flesh and makes the hair stand up—that, on the go-off gives the impression of a saw being drawn across a bass violin string, toward the middle reaches something akin to the grunt of an old pig, from there on crescendoes right on up to the honk of a fog-horn, and finally, after a long lingering crackling on the soul-tearing peak of its pitch and intensity and dissonance, breaks in a choking, sputtering gasp.

Blackie took a chance. He took his eyes off the cabin door for long enough to bend over and whisper:

"Say, lad, does Green snore? You savvy snore? All same makum noise likum pig pretty soon die, when um sleep?"

Blackie's description tickled Aguinaldo's risibles. His face was a grinning complex of apish, Mongolian hideousness.

"I don' know if Mist' Green snore," he answered. "Me, I snore like —— las' night. Mist' Green tell you by wireliss I snore las' night?"

"Did he tell me by wireless you snored last night!"

Blackie straightened up, for he had spoken that considerably above a whisper. He watched for a few moments—or rather, he listened to the music. Of one thing he was positive. Only one of the three in that cabin was asleep. Finally he bent over again.

"I no savvy what you mean, lad," he said. "Talkum fast."

"*Si*," Aguinaldo responded. "Las' night this two —— fella tie me and Mist' Green all up *bocksock*. They make for us to sleep in the two cabin chairs. This two fella take for himself the two folding bunks. We go to sleep. Like ——! Long time bimeby Mist' Green he lean over in chair and whisper: 'Aguinaldo, you snore now. Snore like —— I going to send wireliss.' I say: '*Si*.' I do. Snore like ——. Then——"

"Wait a minute," Blackie cut in, and straightened up for another look forward. Then, bending over again—

"Yes?"

"I snore like —— Then this two fella get —— mad. They get down off folding bunks. They pick me up and carry me back in cockpit. Savvy?"

Blackie straightened up and resumed his vigil. Now he understood something about that *S. O. S. Blue Rock*. While those two crooks were carrying the Filipino aft to the cockpit, Green had managed to get on his pins and hop over to the radio desk. He couldn't have used his motor-generator; he didn't have time to start it, and if he did start it the two crooks would have heard the sing of it. But he could have used his spark-coil. He must have. But if his hands were bound in the same way as Aguinaldo's had been, that is, not only bound together at the wrists but made fast to his body, then how did he work the switches and the key? Blackie could see but one explanation: Green had worked the switches with his mouth, and sent that *S. O. S. Blue Rock* with his *chin* on the key. No wonder he was so short and sweet about it. And no wonder Rusty had commented on the "punk" sending.

THE impulse was strong within Blackie to make a dash forward into the cabin, but he didn't want to start any gun-play in there. A stray bullet might get Green. He thought of bundling Aguinaldo up in the blanket again, and having him let out a shout, call for a drink of water. But no; this would succeed in bringing only one of the crooks out, and he would see the *Dolly Dean* alongside before he got aft to the cockpit. The situation would then develop into a roundy-go-roundy, bullet-dodging skirmish with no telling what results. The idea was to hook the pair of them without waste of ammunition.

Then another idea presented itself. He could put Aguinaldo in the *Dolly Dean*, have him shove off and drift for about twenty yards, then start the engine and duck down behind the gunwale. The roar of the engine would bring the pair of them out of the cabin on the run. He would have them. If they wanted a little target practise he would give it to them.

Before he could execute the idea, however, things matured of themselves. Wharton, the tall, slim, hawk-faced one, stepped out of the cabin. Blackie brought his gun up over the hatch. But the tall crook never looked. He walked slowly, listlessly aft, hands in his pockets, eyes on the deck. He was hatless, coatless. A cigaret hung from his sour, scowling mouth. He appeared in a sore grouch. Well might he be, with such terrific snoring to sleep near, thought Blackie.

Wharton took four steps aft, then stopped, turned and stood gazing at the seascape to the eastward in a half-awake, glowering way, the cigaret dangling low. From his right hip-pocket protruded the butt of a gun. After standing thus for a full minute he turned his head forward and began belching soul-blackening gushes of vile obscenity at the cabin door.

With the crook's head thus turned forward Blackie thought he saw a golden opportunity. Stepping up out of the cockpit, with the springy, gliding stealth of a tiger he moved forward along the passageway. He halted at the crook's back. Wharton was cursing his sleeping pal.

"——! You kicked like —— last night about the —— nigger's music! You——"

The cyclonic epithet died in Wharton's throat. Blackie jerked the gun from his pocket and pushed him overboard.

Blackie slipped the gun into his pocket and dashed forward into the cabin, trusting Aguinaldo to keep Wharton from climbing back aboard.

It was rather a crowded cuddy, with the two folding bunks down, one on each side. In the center was a small round table, heaped with coats and hats. Forward were two chairs; in one of these sat Walt Green, bound wrists and ankles. He was very much awake; he could hardly be otherwise, with the racket going on in the bunk within a few feet of him.

Mr. Berg, maker of the music, was a very sound sleeper. He lay there on his back gagging ecstatically. He was on the crackling peak of a gasp when Blackie took a great handful of his shirt-front, lifted him out of the bunk and stood him on his feet. He tottered, almost crumpled over in a heap, but came to in time.

"Stick your hooks up!" Blackie commanded in a voice that might have brought a dead man out of it. "Turn around!"

Berg spun dizzily. He had been sleeping with his trousers on, and Blackie thought he might have a gun on him.

"His gun is in the bunk under the pillow, skipper," spoke up Green, and followed that up with a roar of laughter that bid fair to lift the overhead bulkhead.

Blackie then ordered Berg to untie the lashings that bound Green, explaining—

"I'd cut 'em, but I don't see any more rope right at hand, and I want to get this bird tied up *pronto*."

Blackie backed up to the door and looked aft. He saw the little Filipino squatting on his haunches in the waterway, in his hand a monkey-wrench, with which he was threatening to smash Wharton's knuckles, if the crook in the water didn't continue to just hang on.

Green held out his bound hands, which caused Blackie to laugh.

"Then you didn't send that *S. O. S. Blue Rock* with your chin, eh?" he said. "I figured they might have had you tied up in the same way as they did the lad."

"With my chin!" Then Green laughed. "Lord, no; I used my hands. It was tough going, though. Try it some time. Try to send with your hands tied. I had no hopes of any one getting it. I had only a few moments, and all I could use was that little spark-coil there."

"Get it? Say," Blackie bragged, "those kids in my gang can snare anything. They can read lightning!"

He paused a moment.

"The funny part of it is, though, in this case the worst is the best. If I hadn't broken the *Dolly Dean's* propeller shaft on a porpoise's nose, I'd have come alongside full speed and walked right into a pair of guns."

THE *Wild Oats* was soon Felgo bound. The would-be kidnapers, fast and secure, sat back in the cockpit, with Aguinaldo, at his beloved engine a little forward, watching over them. He had a monkey-wrench in his pocket with which to "make *bocksock*," but that was unnecessary. The *Dolly Dean* was towing nicely astern. Blackie had the wheel, with Green at his side.

"They stuck me up a few miles north of Felgo Bay yesterday afternoon," Green was explaining, "when I was about to swing around and head back for Felgo. I'd had them out about two hours and I thought they ought to have the run of her. But when I went to swing around they told me they wanted to go to Blue Rock. I laughed at them. They *demanded* Blue Rock. Stuck their guns in my face. What could I do? If I'd balked, they'd have simply flattened me out—the lad, too, probably—and taken her up there themselves. Best I could see was to do as they told me and watch for an opportunity to trip them up.

"I knew what their game was, of course. I knew I was being kidnaped; that they were out for some of old Walt Green's money."

"What were you going to do for eats?" queried Blackie. "Do you keep this boat stocked with provisions for an extended cruise?"

"Why, no. I never stock up unless I'm making a cruise of a few days. That wasn't worrying them. They were going to dump the lad and me off on the rock this morning, and run the *Wild Oats* back to Felgo themselves. It would have been up to us to live on eggs, mussels, and whatever else we could find until my dad kicked through and they let him know where we were."

Green was thoughtfully silent for a few moments.

"You know, come to think of it, skipper," he went on abruptly, "that wouldn't have been so bad at that. Great experience. Just imagine. Living in one of those caves with the sea-lions—eating gulls' eggs—lapping moisture off the rocks. On the level, I'm half-sorry you didn't let them put it over."

"Then why yell for help?" was Blackie's retort. "As far as that goes you can take a cave-man vacation on Blue Rock any time—without it costing your father fifty or a hundred thousand dollars. But say—this baby handles nice!"

Without replying Green began pacing fore and aft.

"By the way," he said at length, "give me the full name of the operator that received my *S. O. S. Blue Rock*."

"Patsy Terry Hannigan," Blackie complied. "On the Rock, he's just 'Rusty.' "

"He's German, eh?"

And grinning, Green wrote it down.

"I'll turn him over to old Walt Green," he added. Then— "So you like the way she handles, eh?"

"I said so," Blackie answered. "And don't forget that my gang are stripping Fog Rock of poultry, rabbits, and guano to get her. We want to buy her."

Green made no reply. He resumed pacing fore and aft.

The *Wild Oats* heaved with the long swell, rolling a little, pitching a little, now and then throwing up a dash of spray that swished over the forecastle and struck with a *spat* against the cabin windows.

This sixty feet of floating magnificence was beyond Blackie's wildest sally of imagination. He was head over heels in love with her. Never had he handled such a craft. He had steered two battle-ships, one destroyer, one cruiser, two tugs and countless launches; but nothing ever that acted in this way. She steered with a finger—with an eyelid! She didn't need any steering! And she glided so smoothly; no rumbling, no vibration. She seemed to move on air, not water.

He thought of his poor humble little *Dolly Dean*, back there on the tow-line. She had been a good faithful little pal for nearly two years. But somehow she was losing her drag this morning.

Green was still walking slowly fore and aft. Each time he turned, he halted, and for a moment looked Blackie up and down tentatively, as if he had something of a delicate nature to communicate, but knew not just how to go about it.

"Skipper," he began finally, "I'd be glad to sell the *Wild Oats* to the bluejackets of Fog Rock. They can have her. But how is this going to work out with you fellows? Won't it make trouble in the long run? What I mean is, how are you going to satisfy the fellow going out of the service, say, or being transferred? They can't cut up the boat."

"I've thought that all over," Blackie answered. "I figured on buying them out one by one and owning her myself in time. You see, I've got some oil-stock, twenty-five hundred dollars worth—Felgo-Texas."

Green stopped short and pivoted.

"Felgo-Texas? Why, my father has a carload of that stock."

"I know," Blackie laughed. "That's why I went in on it. Old Walt Green's lead was good enough for me."

Here their attention was drawn by a ball of smoke that hove up on the horizon, bearing almost dead ahead. Green stepped over to a locker and took down a pair of binoculars. He then lowered one of the cabin windows.

"I think it's one of your navy tugs out of Felgo," he said, after training the glasses a few moments.

"I think you're right without looking," Blackie replied. "I told Rusty to report your *S. O. S. Blue Rock* to the commandant in Felgo. She's a little late getting on the scene. But I suppose the message hung fire a while. Then a tug wouldn't have steam up at that time of the night."

Blackie changed the course a few degrees, to bring the smoke dead ahead.

"Well say, skipper," said Green, "as long as your lads are going to buy her, why couldn't I shift over on to the tug with those two birds aft, and let you go ahead back to Fog Rock in the *Wild Oats?* I'll leave Aguinaldo with you to give you all the dope on the engine. He can come in any time. He has a job on my new boat."

"Man, you're talking my language!" Blackie replied with force. "I left the Rock yesterday morning to negotiate for this boat. I haven't seen any of my gang since. Talked to Rusty on the 'phone, was all. But if I can bring 'er back—" Blackie's voice quit on him.

"Why sure," said Green. "I'll go aft and tell Aguinaldo."

Green returned the binoculars to the locker. From the locker he furtively took a deck of playing cards. He then went aft. Back in the cockpit he explained things to Aguinaldo. While so doing his fingers were busy manipulating the cards. Having stacked them to his satisfaction he returned to the cabin and, unnoticed by Blackie, slipped them back into the locker.

"Everything is O.K., skipper," he said. "I've told Aguinaldo. He'll stay with you long enough to give you all the dope on the engine—or on any part of her, for that matter. How's the smoke now?"

The ball of smoke was now a great black cloud. The big navy tug was not more than three miles distant. Green gave Aguinaldo the bell for slow speed.

"Tell the Fog Rock boys to be in no hurry about paying," he added.

Blackie turned on him.

"Hang it, Green, this is sure a fine stunt on your part. It'll be appreciated. You can bet on that."

"Bet?" Green laughed. "I'd bet on anything. That's my one big weakness. By the way—" He hesitated, then went on slowly—"while we're on the subject of betting—I've heard that you're a pretty good sport. Wonder if you'd be game to take a chance, if I made a proposition to you?"

"Shoot."

"You've got, you say, twenty-five hundred dollars in Felgo-Texas. Also you've got the *Dolly Dean*. Call it thirty-five hundred in all. I'll put the *Wild Oats* against the works. We'll play one hand of showdown for it."

"No you don't," was Blackie's prompt come-back. "The *Wild Oats* represents five thousand dollars. I don't want any charity."

"With the agreement," Green hastened to qualify, "that if you lose, you'll owe me the remainder—fifteen hundred dollars." And after a moment of silence, he still further qualified— "With interest."

With that Green again took up his fore-and-aft promenade. Blackie's eyes were fixed on the cloud of smoke ahead, but he wasn't seeing it. He was considering a very simple problem in arithmetic.

"It would take me a year to pay that much," he said weakly.

"I've give you five years to pay it. How's that?"

"I told you I don't want any charity!"

"All right," Green came right back. "Then, if you lose, you'll owe me fifteen hundred dollars, with interest—to be paid in *one* year. How's that?"

Saying which he continued strolling fore and aft.

"And even if you lose," he added, "Fog Rock won't lose out on the *Wild Oats*. If you win, she's yours; if you lose, your lads'll get 'er. How's that?"

Blackie turned and stood sidewise at the wheel. They stood eye to eye for several seconds. Finally Blackie spoke, low and slowly.

"Green—I've told you I want no charity. I mean that. You can't *give* me the *Wild Oats*. But that proposition listens O.K. I will play you that hand of show-down—under just those conditions."

Green reached up into the locker and brought down the deck of cards. For a few moments he made a noise with them, as if he were giving them a vigorous shuffling. Blackie had his eyes ahead on the oncoming ship.

"All right, skipper," said Green, "here they go."

With which he dealt one card, face down, on the table.

"Wait a minute," Blackie checked him. "I want to cut those cards."

Green's face fell. But he was game enough to brazen it out.

"Cut! What, between two gentlemen?"

"You're —— right!" And there was no mistaking Blackie's sincerity. "I cut those cards before they're dealt. Don't think, young fellow, that you can ease anything like that over on me. Don't think either that I'm an ingrate," he smiled. "I appreciate what you're trying to do. But you can't *give* me the *Wild Oats*. I want to *win* 'er! Let's have those cards."

The skipper of Fog Rock was a hard case, thought Walt Green. How, in the name of the eternal stars, he asked himself, was he going to get this ship over to Blackie, if the —— fool wouldn't take her? If the show-down was to be on the level, there was no telling how it would come out. He, Green, would no doubt win. He always did. And he didn't want what little Blackie had.

"Let's call it off," he said carelessly.

"Call —— off!" Blackie boomed at him. "You made the proposition. Now live up to it. Let's have that deck."

Nothing remained but to trust to the gods. Green handed him the cards. Blackie neglected the wheel for long enough to shuffle them. Then he tossed them back on the table.

"Deal 'em," he said, and turned his eyes on the ship ahead. "Deal 'em face down."

"Draw cards?" said Green, a last flickering hope at the back of his head.

"No draw." Blackie turned, a handsome smile on his fine, dark face. "Because—you wouldn't draw to your hand."

Green dealt the two hands, face down on the table. He picked up Blackie's and handed them to him. The gunner didn't look at them. He held them in his right hand at his side. He stood sidewise at the wheel, with his left hand on the king-spoke.

"Well, what have you got?" he demanded, fixing Green with boring eyes.

All the color left Green's face when he looked at his cards. He fidgeted from one leg to the other. He looked at his hand a half-dozen times. His blue eyes danced nervously. He ran his fingers through his blond hair.

"Let's make it the best two out of three," he suggested.

"Look here, Green, you've got your feet wet now. You can't back down out of this proposition. What have you got?"

"What have *you* got?"

"I don't know," Blackie laughed. "I haven't looked. You have. Therefore, you speak first."

Green took another look at his cards.

"Hang it, skipper." He hesitated a moment, fidgeting nervously. "I've got three tens."

"Let's see 'em."

Green spread his cards out on the table—three tens, a six and a king. Blackie took his left hand off the wheel and scratched the back of his neck.

"That's some hand," he said, and then held up and looked at his own. He grunted—

"Tough luck," and handed his cards to Green.

"Serves you good and right!" Green exclaimed, opening them out. There was a short period of dead silence. Then Green let out a war-whoop that made Blackie hold his ears. For in Blackie's hand were three queens.

THEY signaled the tug. She stopped and hove to while the *Wild Oats* went alongside. Blackie boarded her and explained things to her commanding officer. The two crooks were transferred. Then after shaking hands with Green, the gunner stepped back aboard his ship. The *Wild Oats*, with the crippled *Dolly Dean* in tow, shove off and swung about, Fog Rock bound.

THE EXILE

by Berton Braley

I'M SICK of the Mongol and Tatar;
I'm sick of the Jap and Malay,
And far-away spots on the chart are
No place for yours truly to stay.
I've had enough undersized chicken
And milk that comes out of a can;
The East is no region to stick in
For this one particular man.

I'm weary of curry and rice all
Commingled with highly spiced dope;
I'm weary of bathing with lysol
And washing with carbolic soap.
I'm tired of itch, skin-diseases,
Mosquitoes and vermin and flies;
I'm fed up on tropical breezes,
And sunshine that dazzles my eyes.

Oh, Lord, for a wind with a tingle,
An atmosphere zestful and keen;
Oh, Lord, once again just to mingle
With crowds that are white folks—and clean.
To eat without fear of infection,
To sleep without using a net,
And throw away all my collection
Of iodin, quinin et cet.

To know all the noise and the clamor,
The hurry and fret of the West
I'd trade all the Orient glamour
That damned lying poets suggest.
They sing of the East as enthralling
(And that's why I started to roam)
But—I hear the Occident calling;
Oh, Lord, but I want to go home!

The CAMPFIRE
A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

ALACRANS, black and white. And a new one in the snake line—a two-headed specimen:

Forest Park., Illinois.

Permit me to say a few words about the Mexican scorpion, or "alacran."

DURING more or less three and a half years in the bush in the States of Vera Cruz and Oaxaca I have never seen nor heard of any one being fatally bitten by the black scorpions that are found in these parts.

However, it was told to me that at Acapulco on the west coast there is a white-colored "alacran" that is a killer and that a bounty is paid to the kids to collect them. They hunt them with a lantern at night and are paid for the tail, part of which is used by the druggists for some sort of a remedy. Have not beeen there so I can not vouch for this tale. They also tell of an insect called the *niño* which means "child" because of the similarity of the insect's head to a youngster. This insect is also supposed to be a killer. One fellow in telling me (he was a merchant from Salina Cruz) elaborated his story, saying that when they had discovered the insect in the room they all turned to to hunt it down, but—it got away.

GETTING back to the scorpions. I lived for over a year at Tolosa in Oaxaca on a cane plantation. The building was a dilapidated frame affair and it was my duty every night to kill four to five of these "alacrans" who were always in the room. There was also an old couch, which was also used to store things, in the room and I noticed that every night about this couch would be wing sections of cockroaches. It struck me that the scorpions came into the room to hunt these fellows and I had it removed. Had no more scorpions for visitors, but I searched the room just the same. Native help on the place would get bitten occasionally, but they only complained of a soreness of the part bitten and a slight swelling. However, one night just before turning in one of them came to the house holding his head with one hand and making signs with the other. He was unable to speak. He had been bitten on the head as he went to lie down. I doped the spot with iodine and told him it was nothing, not to worry, etc. Next morning he was all right.

Once another lad and myself decided to swim at a likely stream just back of Naranjos in the State of Vera Cruz. Al was just drawing on his trousers when he let out a yell and danced about. He had been bitten by an alacran that evidently crawled into them during the time we were in the water. Mr. Alacran left five stings.

Once at the Gambrinus Hotel in Salina Cruz I saw a guest, tourist he was, attempt to pick up an alacran with his handkerchief. Advised him to be careful. Alacran nipped him on the forefinger and he sure was surprized.

That concludes what experience I have had with alacrans.

WHILE on the subject of Mexican things, has any one ever heard of or better yet actually seen a two-headed snake that is talked of so much in Oaxaca and Vera Cruz? They are called by two names in Spanish, "Dos Cabezas" and also "Mano de Matate." The latter name because they resemble the stone-grinder affair that the Indians use in making the *masa* of their tortillas. I discounted the stories but last summer while at an interior camp in Vera Cruz one of the geologists claimed that there was one in an old pit that he examined. These pits were six feet deep and the snake had evidently fallen into it. Some time later I was called suddenly from the house by the officer in charge of the soldiers to interview some parties caught wandering around the camp. I grabbed my flashlight and a machete. Something lay in the road ahead and as I flashed the light closer the native yelled, "Snake—Mano de Matate!" I struck it once with the sharp blade. It's a small snake about two feet long and tapered at the ends. Upper part is a grayish-black color and the under side yellowish-white. Body appears formed like the armadillo, that is in sections, overlapping. It is difficult to decide which end is the head. Instead of a mouth the snake has just a hole at one end. The other end is without it. Natives claim this snake will snap itself together and leap through the air, and they say it is very poisonous.—I. FREDERIC JOHNSEN.

FOLLOWING our more recent Camp-Fire custom of asking our artists to follow our writers' example and introduce themselves to us all, A. L. Ripley, who painted the cover for this issue, stands up and greets us:

London, England.

After reading so many wonderfully interesting stories from real adventures in the Camp-Fire columns I find it very difficult to say anything.

THE readers of *Adventure* who have seen some of my covers will no doubt guess that I am tremendously interested in old ships and sea-lore, including pirates of every kind. My biography, I am afraid, is quite uneventful. However, as I am twenty-eight I still have some time ahead of me for adventure. My particular occupations are hunting and fishing. To be more explicit, wing shooting and fly casting. I never have cared for big game shooting of any kind. I have always lived in or near Boston, but in spite of that fact have always been keen for travel. Alaska and the South Seas are two ambitions which I hope to gratify.

I am sorry not to have some real adventures to relate but they seem always to have eluded me. At present I am finding life well worth while in London and the historical value of the Tower of London is so great that I am afraid it will stir up something for an *Adventure* cover before very long.—AIDEN S. RIPLEY.

SOME data on various points in connection with the Custer fight:

Fromberg, Montana.

An old friend of mine was in charge of the supplies on the steamship line, Capt. Grant Marsh. Gen. Terry had no written orders for Gen. Custer, but told him if he had to engage the enemy to be careful. Mr. Sweetman states that when Curley came and reported that Custer and all his men were killed between 9.30 and 10.15 A.M., June 25, 1876, the *Farwest* was at Rankin Landing close to Tullach Fork and not at the place the other writer stated. Curley came early in the morning of the 26th. They got there the 27th. Decomposition had set in as it was very warm.

Mr. Sweetman came to Fort Benton July 4, 1864. He has a good memory posted on all subjects pertaining to those days. Charles Reynolds was Custer's chief of Scouts.—D. J. MCDOUGALL.

AN AMERICAN who's been nearly twenty years in Australia. It's a bit rough of him to send us that iced beer line, but he wrote in last December and probably didn't think it might see print during a warmer part of the year.

Wonder whether by any chance what he says about the American, Black, is news to some one in Iowa?

Everton Park via Brisbane,
Queensland, Australia.

I saw a discussion in Camp-Fire a year or so ago about hoop-snakes in North Carolina, Kentucky and Tennesse. I was too sick at the time to get into the argument, but, take it from me, there is no such thing. How do I know? Because I was born and reared in those hills and hunted for squirrels, turkeys, wild hogs and ginseng all over those States at all seasons of the year. So if a man happens to tell you that he has seen a snake take its tail in its mouth and roll after him like a hoop in order to catch him and bite him, just ask him the color of the moonshine he was drinking.

Well, we just got through a prohibition campaign here in October. The Wets carried by over 80,000 majority. A good thing, too, because it is very hot here now—about 100° in the shade and getting hotter. A glass of iced beer doesn't taste bad, let me tell you.

I see in Camp-Fire several inquiries about Australia. I think I could give the views, not of the man who rides first class around coastal cities and sees only the scenery from the carriage window, but of a man who spent nearly sixteen years pushing his boots along the track with his swag on his back, his tucker-bag nearly empty and night coming on, wondering how much farther it is to the the next water-hole and what the next job will be and how long it will be before he finds it. Of course, I have not carried my swag this last three years. I have not been able. I spend most of my spare time in the military hospital since the war, but never mind, I might roll up my blankets and take a stroll up to see St. Peter any day now. Kismet—who knows? What's the use of grousing, anyhow?

By the way, there was another American here in the hospital. He died about three months ago. His name was Black. I don't remember his Christian name. He came from somewhere in Iowa.

Funny, isn't it? I bet that while I had to look for a cool place to write this letter in, you will hunt a warm place to read it in.—ANDERSON F. BARNETT.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Charles F. Emrich rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Los Angeles, Calif.

In introducing myself I shall try to confine myself to the limits which properly circumscribe the newcomer, in the fervent hope that my future offerings may so impress the old-timers as to bring them to ask for more intimate details.

I have spent a few years on the sea, more of them in the wondrous wilds of northern Minnesota, the land of woods and waters, and did a little cowboying in Montana and Wyoming as a fitting diversion from the lively pursuit of nuggets in Australia, South Africa, Alaska and our own glorious West.

You will readily observe that the lovely mantle of charming youth has long since slipped from my shoulders, and I don't mind telling you that its place is well filled by rheumatism and kindred luxuries; but while tonneau and engine are sadly in need of repairs, the top still shines with the glow of things the memory holds.

You conclude your invitation with the line "We are very glad to welcome you into the *Adventure* family," and I want to assure you that I am most happy to accept the invitation.—CHARLES F. EMRICH.

A 1922 letter on scalping, just drawn from our cache, written by our old friend, Captain L. H. North.

Columbia, Nebraska.

In *Adventure* of June 20th is something about scalping by J. Allan Dunn, and perhaps it would interest him to know of the two instances that I know of.

IN THE summer of 1867 a man by the name of Wilson was scalped near Plain Creek Station on the W. P. R. R. The Indian who scalped him tucked the scalp under his belt and in getting on his horse it slipped and fell to the ground. After the Indian had ridden away and it began to get dark, Wilson (whom the Indian thought dead) got up, picked up his scalp and started for Kearney station, forty miles away. The next day he was picked up by a party of R. R. men and taken to Kearney and from there was sent to Omaha. He carried the scalp with him in a small pail of water. He got to Omaha, as I remember, the third day after he was scalped and was treated by a Doctor Moore.

The (—?) had gotten into the wound and his head was in a fearful condition, but he recovered and later went back to England. He had the scalp tanned and took it with him. About twenty-five ot thirty years later he sent it to Dr. Moore, and the doctor put it in the Public Library in Omaha, where it is now.

In 1868 or '69, I think, a conductor of the W. P. while fishing near Sidney, Nebraska, was scalped. He recovered and I used to see him years afterward. I have heard of other cases, but these are the only ones that I knew of personally.

AS TO the size of the scalp they varied greatly. I have seen them no larger than a silver dollar, as Mr. Dunn says, and others that were six inches in diameter.

At a Pawnee War Dance in 1862 Crooked Hand, a great Skee-chee warrior, wore a robe made from the hide of a black and white steer and around the edge of the robe were fastened the scalps that he had taken. There were 71 of them and they were all sizes, but my recollection is that most of them were about four inches in diameter.

I was more than interested in Hugh Pendexter's "Pay Gravel." The ranchman he speaks of (Johnny Bowman) I knew very well. In the Fall of 1876 he had a ranch seven miles from Ft. Laramie on the Cheyenne Road. Afterward he went to Billings, Montana, where he was killed.—CAPT. L. H. NORTH.

A BREEZY letter from a comrade who says he's drafty and signs himself "Windy." His advice on taking up lumberjacking sounds like sound sense.

Friends of Dick Taylor, formerly of the San Francisco *Examiner*, please note.

Mohawk, Plumas County, California.

Going through your December edition last night, I saw where some folks were interested in Death Valley. Never been there myself but considerable of a portion of my family strayed around there some time back in '48 or '49. I think they left a few of those wagons somebody spoke about.

My great-grandmother, who died about ten years ago, was the only woman survivor of the party. She was some survivor; that's how come I'm here to bother you with this. She got so old she finally dried up and went back to Death Valley to live with that crowd of wagons. She did this somewhere between the age of ninety-six and one hundred.

I AM enclosing "two bits"— your Eastern guys hear me—that's a quarter, which I think is the price of a seventy-one button. I am a pretty fair Westerner, considering motor cars, airplanes, speedboats and such things as we jiggers have to contend with.

Can handle all aforementioned contraptions, am a "Gentle Annie" on a horse, sharpshooter, service rifle, and with those two little sidearms I manage to keep going. Because I live in the mountains this is possible.

The lumberjacks here are a vanishing tribe. Plenty I. W. W. but of the wobbliest Wabbly kind. I am writing this in a box-factory bunk-house. We winter in by working in the box-factories and then hit our regular graft in Summer.

Most of us fellows can hit off 'most any job in the woods.

Say, you *Adventure* hounds, who is going to Manchuria with me and start a saw-mill? If we don't, somebody else will.

I HAVE done some time around the Frisco *Examiner* with "Dick Taylor." Dick has gone West. He was one good man when it came to photography and I think was nearly in a class with Jimmy Hare. This is to notify any of Dick's buddies where Dick is. Don't care if you don't print the rest of this, but give Dick his 30 notice.

IF ANY one in the East is looking for good healthy outdoor work the freights are still running to Westwood, Weed, Susanville, Portola, Klamath Falls, Fort Bragg, Casper, Scotia, Eureka, Greagle, Merced Falls and the Feather River country.

But listen to me, buddy, come healthy and at least moderately husky, because it's no pipe in the woods out here. Those old guys that used to rap a peavey around a twelve-inch log and carry it around would have to rap one good choker around same here and let the yarder do the same. One guy just quit here and laid his check in a magazine and now you ought to see him going through *Adventure*.

This is a long draft from a drafty kid, so in closing I would like to request some gent, whiskered or otherwise, to slip me the lowdown on some of the old cowboy trail songs, preferably the "Chisholm Trail."

Any time you want any dope on northern California, just slip a line to "Windy."—JAMES BRIER.

ON THE occasion of his first story in our magazine Douglas Oliver follows Camp-Fire custom and rises to introduce himself:

Chatham, Ontario, Canada.

My introduction to the *Adventure* family must necessarily be short. For the twenty-nine years of my life have been spent out of the flood-light of adventure, with the possible exception of a period between August, 1915, and May, 1919, when along with other young Canadians I did the recognized health resorts of France and Flanders.

Return to civilian life found me back in newspaper harness. A year of that and I dropped the pad and pencil for the automobile game—a case, simply, of swapping fascination for remuneration. However, the desire to scribble still stuck with me, and only recently—and this time in the nature of an experiment—I turned again to the ancient typewriter.

BETWEEN Arras and Vimy—places in my story—were many underground tunnels of ancient construction some of which, I am certain, were used by the belligerents. There is nothing "faked" about the Germans' use of steel trees for observation purposes. The Mellicourt of my yarn is Mericourt on my old maps. It was in the German line. The gap between the two brigade frontages, as I have described it, was certainly there in that plain country and many of our patrols were shot up in crossing it. The mythical part of my story is Creeps Copse, which did not exist—at least around those parts.—DOUGLAS OLIVER.

WHY can't we, as suggested in the following letter, broaden our anti-weapon discussion to cover methods of checking the crime-wave that is a reason, or excuse, for the agitating of futile and dangerous anti-weapon legislation? Among us are law-makers, law-enforcers, law-breakers, criminologists and criminals, common or garden humans and specialists of all kinds.

At what other gathering anywhere could the matter be discussed in all its aspects and from all points of view?

If you have carefully considered suggestions, send them in. If you prefer not having them printed, say so, or send them to Mr. Cantrell in our care.

Cantrell Lumber Company, New York.

A very pertinent editorial in the New York *Evening Telegram* of Dec. 10th, 1923, with regard to vigilantes to combat increasing crime, as suggested by Mr. E. A. St. John, President New York Indemnity Company and Mr. William B. Joyce, Chairman, National Surety Company.

It appears that an estimate of $500,000 worth of property is stolen in New York each business day.

It occurs to the writer, who has been a reader of the magazine from the first copy to date, that a discussion of ways and means by its readers toward securing from them suggestions as to means of reducing this enormous loss, as well as the heavy expense entailed of handling such matters through the courts, would not be out of their field of endeavor.

There have been many logical suggestions as to the Sullivan Law; why, therefore, can there not be a general discussion of the suppression of crime toward the end of getting suggestions some of which could no doubt be acted upon, if placed before interested parties such as Mr. St. John and Mr. Joyce?
—C. W. CANTRELL.

AN INTERESTING case of a bullet stopped by a small object on the person and of the effect on said person:

Carleton's Laboratories,
Eureka Springs, Arkansas.

I have just read with interest, Jack W. Yoe's letter in Camp-Fire and hope he comes again. Wonder if he knows that Hon. Geo. J. Crump is still living and a resident of Harrison, Ark.

Last night I read your little squib anent one of Raymond Spears' stories in which pearls stopped a bullet. J. G. McKown, who used to be a puncher and later a jeweler in Canadian, Texas, told of an instance that came under his observation, in which an open faced watch stopped a Colt .45 lead bullet at close range. It caused a slight stinging sensation and a little redness of the flesh, but the party that was hit climbed an eight-foot chicken fence after the shot was fired and was at work the next day as usual. The funny part was that only the face of the watch was smashed—but the bullet imbedded itself in the works exactly as if melted and poured in, and the back was not dented.

Best wishes,
In the Heart of the Ozarks.—WILL CARLETON.

AT A December Camp-Fire E. E. Preston gave us an account of a queer animal plowed up in muck-land near St. Petersburg, Florida, and asked to have it identified.

Here are two letters from comrades describing something similar. I wonder whether it is what in Ohio we used to call a "water-dog" or "water-puppy"?

Elsinore, California.

In regard to the queer reptile that you write about in the December 30th issue I think that possibly I may be able to give a little information. However, I am not an authority on such things so I will tell just what happened to me.

SOME twenty-five years ago I was visiting my grandmother in a small, saw-mill town of southern Louisiana and, like all boys, I had to do a certain amount of fishing, so I put out a set-line in the mill-pond. Had several baited hooks on it and managed to catch many fish.

One morning while taking the fish from the hooks I found the very strangest thing on one of the hooks that I had ever seen. It looked more like a lizard than anything, only it was about sixteen inches long, had gills like a fish and under those were two small legs. The body was about the same roundness as a broom-handle and had a stubby appearance, it was a slimy, muddy color and on its belly had scales. The head of the thing was flat and broad like that of most poisonous snakes.

I did not know what to think about it so I took it from the hook, (it had swallowed the hook and was dead) strung it with the fish and proudly started home. On my way I met several very old men. They told me to throw the thing and the fish away, saying that it was poison and that the fish would not be good to eat on account of being so close to the thing. They gave it the name of lamp-reel; but I was not to be outdone, so I kept going home. However, I was a little bit afraid that the thing might come to life, and bite me so I held it away from my leg as far as I could.

WHEN I arrived at the house my grandmother made an awful fuss about me bringing that thing home and refused to even clean the fish that I had brought with it and she would not take my word that the thing had not bitten me but had to examine me from head to foot. She said that in the days of her girlhood she had seen many of them plowed up out of the lowlands and that they were as poisonous as a rattlesnake. She also gave it the name of lamp-reel.

As far as the name is concerned I cannot say that it is correct, because the nearest to it that I can find in Webster's Dictionary is the word "Lamprey" and his definition is a fish similar to an eel, so that may be the proper name of the thing, which I am positive from the description you give of yours is a brother of the one that I caught in that mill-pond more than twenty-five years ago.

If any one can give more definite information on this reptile I will be pleased to hear of it.

I forgot to state that my grandmother is well into the nineties, but is still alive to corroborate this letter.—B. S. F.

AND the other letter:

Lavoye, Wyoming.

The reptile you describe in the December 30th issue of *Adventure* is what is known as the Lamprell, pronounced in three syllables—lam-pr-ell. They are said to be very poisonous, but I doubt it. While fishing in a pond in central Texas I caught one on hook and line. They resemble a turtle on the end of a line. Their body is very powerful at twisting and they seem to be pretty tough. I would not be too chummy with them, although I do not believe them to be poisonous.—LOUIS FINK.

LOOKS as if St. Petersburg—or its newspapers—were making a business of finding queer things. But this one got identified. Caught back in December. Newspaper clipping sent by Mr. Preston, who saw said fish. "Ike Walton, Jr." conducts the department "Fishstories" in a St. Petersburg paper.

Boots Collins, head fisherman of the Hibbs schooner "240" bought a hat Thursday two sizes bigger as the result of catching a specimen of the almost extinct Eurypharynx Pelicanoides, 250 miles southwest of Ft. Dade. Using skip-jacks for bait, Boots was fishing in 50 fathoms (300 feet) of water over the coral beds when "Eury" took the hook. Believing he had hooked a salt water rattler, Boots and the rest of the crew took shelter behind the mast when the fish was landed.

Not even the captain knew the name of the finner, although he had been fishing in the waters of the gulf for the past 20 years.

Isaac Walton, Jr., called in to solve the deep mystery, needed only the description of the strange sea inhabitant to identify it as a member of the species Eurypharynx Pelicanoites, few of which are seen in these waters.

The Eurypharynx is of the order Lyomeri and is the only specimen of its genus and the only child of the large family Eurypharynidae which is closely allied to the form Gastrostomus Bairdi and in some classifications the genus Laccopharnyx.

Ichthyologically conversing, the Gastrostomus Bairdi is nothing more than the Pelican fish, well known to those familiar with the inhabitants of the deep. Sometimes it is known as the Pelican eel.

As an inhabitant of the gulf it is the least known to the laymen.

Boot's Eurypharynx was about four feet long. It takes the name Pelican from the construction of its head and beak. A pouch directly underneath the beak is used as a reserve reservoir for food.

The head is very long in proportion to the body, which is like that of an eel. While the general color of the Pelican fish is black, the one caught by Collins reflected all colors of the rainbow. It attracted hundreds of visitors at the Hibbs market Thursday afternoon, not one of whom was able to identify it. A. L. Thayer, local taxidermist, who is mounting the fish was also unable to identify it.

VERY few words in this letter, but a very few words about Bowie stir the interest:

Jameson, Alabama.

Am afraid a comrade got his wires crossed in calling Col. Bowie a Kentucky colonel. Would be glad indeed to claim him as fellow Kentuckian, but the truth is he was from Mississippi and, while he died knife in hand, the record shows that he had emptied his guns. By the way, he was up against "swarthy soldiers." Also, they didn't rush him very hard until his guns were empty and it was bayonets *vs.* "Bowie".

I like a knife very much but had I a scrap in sight, would much prefer my old .44 Colt.—J. O. FARMER.

HERE'S a scorpion that can sting through a leather legging! And another cure for the bite.

Comrade Cook was puzzled as to how, if F. St. Mars is dead, we are still publishing his stories. Evidently he missed our explanation at a previous Camp-Fire. Since St. Mars' death made it impossible to get new stories from him and since there is a strong demand for them from our readers, we have bought some of his stories that, though never printed in America, have been published in England.

Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Friend Camp-Fire:—In the June 20, 1923, issue W. C. Robertson of Honduras writes of the scorpion. I have read a lot of things about this critter but have never seen in type a somewhat interesting fact that I observed in Cuba during the Santiago campaign. I was there with the 34th Michigan Infantry, in the second battalion commanded by Major Latimer of Detroit.

THE major acquired a body servant named Garvino, while we were soaking up malaria in the hills back of Santiago. One day the major was stung by a scorpion—stung him through his leather legging at that. Major Latimer was probably one of the world's greatest technicians in the art of profanity. He tore loose with his entire vocabulary when the virus of the scorpion made itself felt. Then he concluded he was going to die, as many other scor-other scorpion stingees had.

Garvino dug around till he found another scorpion. He broke the critter in two, tore off the major's legging, rolled up his pants and drawers and applied the raw end of half the broken scorpion to the spot on the major's leg where the sting had entered. The pain ceased immediately and the major felt no further discomfort. Thereafter we knew how to treat a scorpion sting. This may be old stuff.

ANOTHER little trick of Garvino was to catch a scorpion, hold it by the head from beneath with thumb and finger, and with his other hand tear out the muscle that actuated the scorpion's sting. You know the scorpion must flip his tail up over his head to strike. After Garvino had performed this operation the scorpion was helpless to sting, though his locomotion was not interfered with.—LEO P. COOK.

A 1922 letter from our cache. We had been discussing the Indian "rope trick."

Las Vegas, Nevada.

The Indian "rope trick" as described in *Adventure*, June 10th, 1922, is done by mass hypnotism, the same as the "basket trick", where a native places a live baby in a basket, covers it up tight, then thrusts a sword through the basket in several places enough to kill the baby over and over. These tricks have been exposed by the camera. The reason the reward was not claimed was because the natives were afraid of some trick to expose them, in which case the rope and basket tricks would become worthless as money-getters.

These are very old tricks. A man I used to know saw the rope trick on two or three occasions, while traveling in India. He could not account for it. The trick he saw was this: After the boy had gone up the rope, the man shook it and became angry. Then he took out a long knife, climbed the rope, holding the knife in his mouth. Directly the arms, legs, head and trunk of the boy came down in pieces, the man followed, stuck the pieces together, pulled down the rope, took up a collection and departed. These tricks showed nothing but the man and the rope when photographed, so it is done by suggestion and hypnotism.—GEORGE C. BOYD.

ANOTHER comrade who witnessed the phenomenon discussed at Camp-Fire some time ago:

New York City.

Mr. A. D. Stewart's letter is in all probability the explanation of a very curious phenomenon witnessed by me a few years ago.

We were spending the summer (1921, I think it was) at Brantingham Lake, Lewis Co., New York, and one evening just after supper, went out on the lake in my canoe. It was not more than fifteen minutes after sunset and, while there were a few clouds on the horizon, the sky above was clear and of a light blue.

Extending from horizon to horizon—about east to west—was a band of dark blue, seemingly about ten feet wide, and crossing it at an angle of 45° was another band extending also from one horizon to the other. The edges were clear cut and not bordered by haze or clouds—the blue of so deep a color that it was plainly visible against a perfectly clear sky. It was, as Mr. Stewart says, "like looking into or through ice." There was no wavering of lines or flicker of any kind, just these two deep bands, which, as darkness set in, gradually faded from view. I have never before or since seen anything like it. It is possible that some of your readers may have seen it or at least something of thesame kind—CHARLES W. SMITH.

ISN'T it the general opinion that there were no survivors of the Custer fight? Anyhow, here's another candidate as presented in a newspaper clipping sent in by comrade G. F. Kittleberger of Curwensville, Pa. Also another clipping from him reporting the death of a descendant of Daniel Boone:

Another Custer Massacre Survivor is Discovered

WASHINGTON, April 28. (By the Associated Press.)—One more survivor of the Custer massacre has been unearthed by the pension bureau.

He is Shuh-shee-ahsh, a Crow Indian, now living on the Crow reservation in Montana, and is drawing a pension for services in the Indian campaigns of 1876 and 1877. Recent investigation of his case resulted in a pension certificate being issued. He escaped by mingling with the Sioux and Cheyennes.

Kin of Boone Dies

PITTSBURG, April 27.—Mrs. Mary Neikirk, aged 83 years, a descendant of William Boone, cousin of Daniel Boone, is dead at her home here. She was born in Boonesburg, Md.

THE Joaquin referred to is, I take it, Joaquin Murieta. H. Bedford-Jones of our writers' brigade sends in the report, not vouching for it. Hugh Pendexter or some of the rest of you can doubtless give us the final word.

The following might or might not supply a topic of discussion for the Camp-Fire. Whether it is "old stuff" I don't know, but have never seen it in print heretfore.

G. F. VON TEMPSKY records that he left San Francisco for Mazatlan, aboard a French brig, July 1, 1853. Among the pasengers were half a dozen Mexicans with whom he became well acquainted; they were friends and followers of the California bandit and murderer, Jaoquin. They gave von Tempsky a most interesting account of Joaquin's career, which he says corroborated the knowledge of Joaquin which he had gained in California, and then went on to say as follows: That Joaquin had not been captured and killed in California at all, as generally supposed; that his flight had been covered by his countrymen; and that, in the beginning of 1853, he had gone overland from California to his native Hermosillo, taking with him his loot. The newspaper accounts of his capture and death were declared false, the imputation being that another man had suffered in his stead.—H. BEDFORD-JONES.

A POCKET handbook for travelers, called "Ocean Records," is issued by *The World Traveler*, and distributed free of charge (so far as a limited edition permits) to any one who writes to the Circulation Manager, *World Traveler*, The Biltmore, New York, The handbook contains 100 pages of information of decided interest and practical value to any one taking an ocean trip and not sufficiently familiar with the sea to answer all the questions passengers ask on a cruise. It includes also much interesting information on foreign countries from a traveler's point of view.

The handbook is of far too much value and too expensive too be distributed broadcast out of sheer benevolence and is, of course, an indirect builder of circulation for the *World Traveler*. I mention it to Camp-Fire because many of you will value a copy as highly as I do mine and because *Adventure* has no objection to furthering a legitimate circulation scheme of the *World Traveler*, a magazine that doubtless many of you would like to know about, if not already familiar with it.

Getting the handbook does not place you under any obligations, though of course you'll probably receive an invitation to subscribe for the *World Traveler*. There is no arrangement between it and our magazine other than appears above and their permission to tell you of "Ocean Records."

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

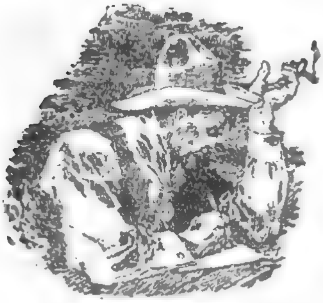
Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons, etc., runs in the last issue of each month.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts



QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question] until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To'avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

1—3. The Sea. In Three Parts
4, 5. Islands and Coasts. In Two Parts
6, 7. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
8. Australia and Tasmania
9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
10. New Guinea
11. Philippine Islands
12. Hawaiian Islands and China
13. Japan
14—17. Asia. In Four Parts
18—25. Africa. In Eight Parts
26. Turkey
27. Asia Minor
28—30. Balkans. In Three Parts
31. Scandinavia
32. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
33. Great Britain
34—36. South America. In Three Parts
37. Central America
38, 39. Mexico. In Two Parts
40—46. Canada. In Seven Parts
47. Alaska
48. Baffinland and Greenland
49—54. Western U. S. In Six Parts
55—58. Middle Western U. S. In Four Parts
59—64. Eastern U. S. In Six Parts
Radio
Mining and Prospecting
Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
Salt and Fresh Water Fishing
Tropical Forestry
Aviation
Army Matters, United States and Foreign
American Anthropology North of Panama Canal
Standing Information

Personal

READERS have been asking for the autobiographies of "Ask Adventure" editors; and those staff members who believe that a few words about themselves will promote better acquaintanceship all around, are responding to the request. The order in which these autobiographies are printed doesn't signify anything. They are withdrawn from the file at random:

Castine, Me.

Scarcely can I know what of my life events will be of most or any interest to "A. A." enthusiasts. You see, I am actually a very quiet sort of body outwardly, and my adventurous stunts have been "all in the day's work" of doing the next best thing. It is a pleasure to sit on the outskirts at Camp-Fire and listen to what real men have to say. *Adventure* has been my favorite magazine ever since I discovered it—it seems living history. Its historical stories should be preserved in a library all by themselves.

The magazine and its writers appeal as worth while, and it is thrilling to be even on the "A. A." list of experts. Am I the only woman?[*] If so, it is no doubt fitting that I be number 13. My hope is that superstitious persons will not refrain from shooting questions my way, since answering them is both a pleasure and a recreation.

But the autobiography! Born one of the ordinary seven hundred (native population) in the seaport and Summer-resort town of Castine, Maine. Educated in the public schools of this town, including the Eastern State Normal School and the University of the World-at-Large—particularly the latter. Have been three times around the world; lived fourteen years in the Philippines and other parts of the Far East. Know Japan quite thoroughly, and have passing acquaintance with all the large cities of this U. S. A., and with eastern China, Hawaii, Borneo, Ceylon, Italy, northern Africa, Malta—and various other foreign points.

I believe I yet hold the record as the only woman who has ever made the ascent of Mt. Apo, the highest peak in the Philippines. During this trip, several years ago, our guides mutinied and started to kill us—my husband, a Corporal Sechrist and myself. We got out of a bad mess by the skin of our teeth and through the faithfulness of the head guide.

Another adventure in the Philippines was my breaking into print with a "muck-raking" eruption of literary aspiration. It is attached. Some "A. A." readers familiar with "bamboo Spanish" may be interested, if you care to give it space.

Má-ree's Pic-a-ninny Goat

Má-ree had a pic-a-ninny goat.
Over that goat she sure did gloat.
His body was black; his soul was *blanco*,
But he always acted like *Pansa Sancho*.

To the *'Mericano* school one day she went,
Her mind on her *libros* soberly bent.
The goat he vamosed and sigued there, too.
"'Sus-marie-sip!" What a hulla-ba-loo!

Hablad the *maestro:* "Git out o' here, quick!
The smell of a goat makes me deathly sick!"
Hablad the goat, "Excuse me, mister—
I only *buscar* a little brown sister."

Hablad the *maestro:* "Brown sister be hanged!
Wait outside!" and the door is banged.
Hablad the goat, "Mi Má-ree is shut in!
'Sperra momento! Here's where I butt in!"

Bueno combate! One goat lies *patai*.
Malo old *maestro* made Má-ree's goat die?
"*No importa*," says Má-ree, gulping a sob.
"Between you and me, you've done a good job!"

Next day, in the market, Má-ree opens a stall
And *vendes* that goat—chops, hide, tail, and all!
Comprars the *maestro* first-classe fresh lamb!
Pobre the goat! *Rica* Má-ree! *Muchodinero!*
Muck-rakers be ——!

—*Grace P. T. Knudson,*[*] in *The Philippines Gossip*, 1906.

Not long ago a photographic cut of my face came out in a New York magazine, and under it was written "teacher, world-traveler, newspaper correspondent, author and business woman."

It all sounds like somebody else when I look in the mirror, but perhaps it is I. Anyway I think business woman hits as near as can be, since most of the years of my life have been devoted to so-called business. It is in the quest for Japanese merchandise—during the past twenty years or so—to be sold in the shops and stores of this country, that I have become interested in and familiar with that empire, and come in contact with its citizens and their living-conditions.

The blood of sea captains and sea rovers of the past yet sings in my veins when I can stand in the bow of a ship heading straight into the shimmering, golden pathway of the westing sun across the illimitable ocean; the taste of stormy, briny spray upon my lips is nectar; and when on land nothing gives me a more surging thrill than the mingled perfumes, unconfined by four walls, of bacon, coffee and resinous boughs—these may be mere smells or aromas to many, but they are to me actual perfumes.—MRS. GRACE P. T. KNUDSON.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

Hötzendorf at Gorlice

BELATED credit to the man entitled to it:

Question:—"Kindly inform me on the following, if you have inside dope:

Is it true that in the early years of the war the plans were all conceived by the Austrian General Hötzendorf and not by the Germans? That Austrian divisions fought in France?"—EDWARD J. SEELEY, Charleston, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Fleischer:—I have inside dope. Lots of it. But from this I can not exactly tell you whether or not *all* the plans were conceived by the Austrian Chief of Staff, General Conrad von Hötzendorf. This general's family name is Conrad; his first name is Franz.

Fact is, however, that he and he alone conceived the plan of attack on the Russian positions at Gorlice, May, 1915, although the glory went to the Germans.

Here's some inside dope, and I am sure *Adventure* is the first magazine to print it.

German headquarters were at Pless, Silesia, and Austrian headquarters at Teschen, Austrian Silesia.

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[*] There is also Aimée D. L. Robinson, who answers questions on "Canada, Part 3, Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario." Her autobiography appeared in the issue of June 10, 1924.—ED.

A difference in province only. An automobile would take an hour to cover the distance. Conrad used to go to Falkenhayn, the German Chief of Staff, or *vice versa*, and the plans were made and laid by oral agreement.

This also happened with this action at Gorlice. Conrad conceived the plan, worked it out in his headquarters and told Falkenhayn about it. The later asked him for data regarding the facilities of Hungarian railroads. After everything was talked over and all details were orally fixed, Falkenhayn sat down and dictated a letter to Conrad in which everything was laid down in writing, even to the minutest details, which could be known only to the Austrians. It was in form of an original plan and naturally looked as if it was an official document originating from and having been worked out by the German General Staff. Accordingly General Mackensen was to command the troops.

Conrad consented, because he gave not a whoop about glory, if the desired result was obtained. It was, because everything worked like clockwork and because he had laid down every detail of the different phases of the attack. Falkenhayn got the credit for it. German troops were the "victors;" the Austrians only "helped." It was part of German world propaganda.

Of course this is only an outline. Similar things happened before and after Gorlice; for instance, the great Italian offensive, which robbed the Italians of the gains of one year's warfare and inflicted upon them the greatest defeat since Custozza in 1866. Conrad used to be the C. O. of the Austrian 14th Army Corps, stationed in Tyrol, and knew every foot of the country. He worked out the plan—but as usual it was a German victory. And other things along the same lines.

Austrian divisions fought in France only in 1918, at St. Mihiel. They were the 10th and 35th Divisions. No other Austrian troops except artillery were on the western front. Austrian heavy batteries reduced the Belgian forts. The Germans had no such mobile howitzers in 1914, with the possible exception of a few pieces of 42's, which were then experimental guns, but were used when the war broke out.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

A Motor-Boat Cruise to Alaska

THE "inside passage"—beautiful, and safe:

Question:—"Since I left college I have been mulling the following scheme over in my mind and have almost come to the point of carrying it out. But before I go any farther, I'd like to get some expert advice.

My scheme is to purchase a thirty-foot sailboat and spend six or eight months cruising through the West Indies with some companion. I could start either from Chicago (my home) or here. As an alternate, I had considered sailing north from Seattle through the inside passage to Alaska. I'm not a sailor, but as a civil engineer I know the principles of 'shooting the sun.'

Now the questions that have been bothering me the most are:

Type of boat, length, draft, auxiliary power?

Its approximate price in New York and Seattle?

Necessary equipment beyond the Government requirements?

Rough idea of the food for two for, say, six months, and approximate cost?

Starting from Chicago is, I believe, impossible. There are few boats there (though they might be found farther north) and the 'Ill. and Mich. Canal' is so silted up that the limiting draft would be nearer 2 feet than 4½ feet.

I would certainly like to have your advice on these points, Mr. Brown, for I am ready to 'blow'—south, west or north."—Bob M., New York.

Answer, by Mr. B. Brown:—For such a cruise as you propose through the West Indian Islands you will require a much larger and much better sea-boat than is necessary for the proposed Alaska cruise. For the latter, my advice would be to use a motor cruiser altogether and not bother with sail. It is inside water all the way save across the entrance to Queen Charlotte Sound and Dixon's entrance, and just as good water as you will find in New York Harbor or Long Island Sound. Going through Seymour Narrows or Peril Strait it is imperative to go through on slack water, for there are very nasty tide rips at other times which make it interesting for a good-sized steamship.

A motor boat can get through without difficulty on slack water, while if you were dependent upon sail, you might get in serious difficulty. I have known two men to make the trip to Skagway and back in a twenty-five-foot cabin launch without the slightest difficulty.

You could pick up a fairly good craft to answer your purposes around Seattle for four or five hundred dollars and could go as much higher as you like. There are hundreds of them scattered all along the inside passage, so that gas can be had at any harbor you make. Same with subsistence. If you have a good launch under you, there is no reason why you should take supplies for more than a few days, because you never will be more than a couple of days or so away from a store where you can replenish your stock.

I flatly do not recommend any West Indian island trip to any man who is not a competent sailorman and navigator. The Alaska trip is another thing, however, for you will be practically all of the time in enclosed waters, and there are innumerable small bays and harbors in which to take refuge in the rare event of heavy weather in the inland waters.

Won't hazard a guess at what you might have to pay for a boat such as you want around New York. It is like saying what a man should pay for a used automobile. Look around the waterfront yourself and you may pick up a bargain. At Seattle there are hundreds of small motor boats for sale at all kinds of prices.

Note from an "A. A." Man

THE spirit moves friend Victor Shaw to discourse upon the results of his work for this department:

I consider "A. A." a decided stimulus. I have only carried the dept. of "Mining" since late in of 1922, and yet I have received and answered several hundreds of letters, perhaps as many as any other of our staff in the same time, though I have no dope on them.

Now I have had return letters from inquirers who have taken my advice to go to various sections for prospecting, etc., and in all cases they have reported their entire satisfaction. I have helped several men lately who have thought they had discovered excellent placer or lode prospects, both in discovering where the metal is in their ground, and also how to work it when they had it.

One man took my advice to go to Alaska. I got a letter recently from him at Cook's Inlet, and he was tickled pink and thanked me for advising him to go. In no case as yet have I found one who was not *more* than satisfied, and in addition was really helped by taking my "A. A." advice. Naturally, this makes a man feel that his work is worth while, but to attain this result one must of course be very familiar with his subject, or section.

I have had my share of exceptions taken to certain statements made in various articles printed in *Adventure*, but in no case was the critic right, technically speaking.

I've had five or six return letters, out of the hundreds I have answered. No doubt many more would have done so, if they had ever given it a thought. However, the fact that we ourselves know we *are* of service is the main thing. I, myself, *know* when I answer a letter of inquiry that my inquirer has all he wants to know, and the fact that he doesn't reply seems probable proof that he is satisfied; especially when coupled with the few returns I *do* get from those who are better trained in courtesy.—VICTOR SHAW.

Workmen of the Shogunate

THEY were the makers of Japan's real "curios"—objects of wondrous beauty that can not be equaled anywhere today:

Question:—"Will you kindly give me information regarding manufacturing, also curios from Japan? Do you have names and addresses of curio shops there? If not, do you know where I can get them?"
—W. R. ADAMS, Willard, O.

Answer, by MRS. KNUDSON:—I assume that you wish a general outline of manufacturing conditions in Japan—which follows:

The Japanese historians count the years of the Tokugawa Shogunate—A. D. 1603-1866—as the "golden age" of their really characteristic industries. Before this period they had imported industrial customs and objects from Korea and China, but during the reign of the Shoguns—we might call them War Lords—communication with these countries was practically closed, and the Japanese adapted and improved upon and assimilated what they had before merely copied.

We can hardly term the industrial life of this period "manufacturing," according to the sense in which we use the word now; but weaving, dyeing, embroidering, wood-carving, pottery-making, metal-fashioning, lacquering, etc., went on at the hands of artists and craftsmen. Being done by hand and very carefully, the products of this time were characterised by beauty and excellence, and are the real "curios" which are coveted and have been sought after by collectors of other countries.

The Emperor's power was restored in 1868. From that year American and European influence, together with the wars with China and Russia and the World War, revolutionized Japanese industrial life and systems. Handwork and domestic industries rapidly developed into scientific factory production and world-wide manufacturing, though even now many things for domestic consumption are made by hand in the homes of country people.

For the last quarter-century or so the commercial and manufacturing history of Japan has closely followed that of the entire world. Japan has had her trusts, her labor unions, her strikes, her millionaire manufacturers, in common with the rest of the world. Her chief handicap in her big factories has been lack of skilled labor. But Government is now encouraging supplementary education of mechanics and has established factory laws to protect such workers.

Statistics show that in 1920 Japan had $165,500,000 authorized capital in 2,447 manufacturing companies. Textile factories headed the list with the major part of this capital; then came breweries, chemicals and electrical products. She then began to feel the effects of the world-wide business depression, from which she had not recovered when two of her most important commercial cities—Yokohama and Tokio—were so completely destroyed by earthquake and resultant fire in 1923. Yokohama was the principal shipping port for all foreign exporting and importing; and in Tokio district nearly one-quarter of the country's manufacturing was done. This disaster naturally demoralized her manufacturing and shipping for a few weeks; but Kobe temporarily took over the work of Yokohama as a port, extra credit was extended to Japan's merchants and manufacturers by the leading commercial forces of the world, and building-materials and machinery were rushed to her; so that she is making a phenomenal recovery from this disaster.

Amongst her leading manufactures are cotton goods, silk fabrics, industrial chemicals, porcelain and pottery, electrical supplies, lacquerware, paper, fancy goods, celluloid, fertilizers, glass, shell, buttons, steel, machinery, rubber, dye-stuffs, matting, toys, brushes.

As for "curios"—a letter of mine dealing with this subject was published in "Ask Adventure," January 10, 1924, to which you might refer if you have kept your copies of the magazine. Modern so-called curios would come more under the head of "Japanese fancy goods" perhaps. One of the most reliable firms in Japan is Yamanaka & Company, Kioto, Japan. There are many in this country dealing in Japanese goods, amongst them Fo Sing Yuen & Co., 104-106 East 16th St., New York City, and Ide & Company, 509 Grant Ave., San Francisco, Calif.

An Idea

IF ANY of you readers happen to have a bit of information that an "A. A." man might find handy, why not pass it along to him? The subjoined correspondence shows how to do it. First we hear from the reader, who in this case is writing to the "A. A." expert in charge of the section dealing with rifles, pistols and revolvers:

Taylor, Tex.

MR. DONEGAN WIGGINS:—

The service bureau of *Adventure* is, in my opinion, both entertaining and instructive; especially so that part which deals with some one's pet hobby. In my case it is firearms.

Aside from the great number of questions asked by readers who desire information on some weapon, past or present, the next greatest number of questions comes from amateur gunsmiths who desire to alter the stocks of their guns from military models to sporters.

No matter how much work they put on their stock, or how fine a job they do, the work is only half finished until a proper preservative has been put on. I have had some eighteen years' experience with different woods, including walnut and other hardwoods. The proper methods of treating them are acquired only by experience.

Gunstocks are usually made of well-seasoned material, and are quite porous. The oil finish is by far the best and most lasting method for them. Therefore I am taking the liberty of enclosing a method which I use with good results. You may use it for future reference—unless you have a better method. In that case no harm can result by relegating it to the background.—Arthur Duce.

Mr. Duce's enclosure is as follows:

HOW TO GIVE YOUR RIFLE STOCK AN OIL FINISH

Oil-finishing a stock has its advantages over any other methods, such as varnishing, shellacking or waxing, for the last three will check, scratch, mar or rub off.

The applying an oil finish does not require any scientific knowledge of painting, and the excellence of the final result depends only on the amount of patience you possess.

I have divided my method into four parts for greater simplicity:

(a) *Preparation of the stock for oiling* (*part one*). Sandpaper the stock until all varnish, grease-stains and scratches have been smoothed down, and the bare wood has been brought to the surface. Polish with fine sandpaper until the wood is smooth to the touch.

(b) (*Optional*). Wet the stock with water to bring out the soft grain. Allow to stand for twenty-four hours, or until you are reasonably sure all water has evaporated. Sandpaper again until the wood is smooth to the touch. You are now ready to begin the actual oiling.

If your stock is made of dark wood, parts one and four are all that is necessary, but if the wood is light or you desire as dark a colored stock as possible, use from one to four.

Material: *Mixing the stain* (*part two*). Pure boiled linseed oil; walnut stain in paste form and ground in oil. To one-half pint of oil add a level tablespoon of the stain. Mix thoroughly and add a small amount of pure turpentine to assist penetration.

Applying the stain (*part three*). Saturate a piece of linen cloth eight or ten inches square with the stain. Apply it evenly over the stock. Then, with the same piece of cloth, proceed to give the stock the darnedest polishing it ever got. Continue rubbing until most of the stain has penetrated. Wipe the balance off with a clean rag and set aside until next day. If the desired color has been obtained with one application of the stain you are ready for oiling; if not, repeated applications will darken it.

Applying the oil (*part four*). Use pure boiled linseed oil without any stain or turpentine. Apply the oil to the stock with your hand. Rub the oil well into the pores of the wood and continue polishing the stock with the palm of your hand or a piece of felt, until most of the oil has penetrated. Allow the surplus to remain on the stock for twenty-four hours. Wipe off any remaining oil from the preceding day and apply another coat in the same manner as the first one. Continue your applications until a smooth, velvety polish has been obtained.

Remember, the greater the number of applications the more beautiful the final result. Also, oil is affected by temperature. The colder the day the thicker the oil; the warmer the day the thinner the oil becomes. Since thinness of the oil will assist penetration no harm will result by having it good and hot for each application.

To Mr. Duce's letter and enclosure Mr. Wiggins made the following reply:

Salem, Ore.

Dear Mr. Duce:—

I am greatly pleased to receive the formula for the refinishing of stocks, and shall send it to the magazine at once. The editors may decide to publish it or they may not, but personally I think it dandy good stuff for the "A. A." department.

I have been using this same process on my own gunstocks for some time, with the exception of either straight walnut stain or else burnt umber added to the oil. Either works very well, I find, and resists weather beautifully.—Donegan Wiggins.

The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan

THE subjoined monograph has been printed in leaflet form on hard paper. The leaflet may be obtained free from the "Ask Adventure" expert responsible for it: namely W. T. Moffat, 67 Burlington Road, Fulham, London, S. W. 6, England. Don't expect any response unless you enclose addressed envelop and return postage:

THE Sudan, or Bilad-es-Sudan (Land of the Blacks) includes a large belt of Africa south of Egypt and the Sahara. The French Sudan is the country of Upper Senegambia and the upper Niger, and the country east of the Niger is often spoken of as the Central Sudan; but at the present time the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan is the only political division properly distinguished by the name.

The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan extends over the Nile basin from Wady Halfa nearly to Gondokoro on the upper Nile, and borders on the Red Sea.

The total approximate area of the Sudan is 1,014,600 square miles, and the total estimated population is 3,400,000.

In 1819 Mehemet Ali of Egypt sent his son Ismail to annex Nubia; and in subsequent years Egyptian rule was extended, chiefly by the efforts of Baker, Gordon and other Europeans, to the Albert Nyanza and the watershed of the Bahr-el-Ghazal.

In 1882 Mahdiism broke out, and the last Egyptian governor, Emin Pasha of the Equatorial Province, was rescued by Stanley in 1889. Nine years later the reconquest of the country was practically completed by Lord Kitchener at the battle of

Omdurman (1898), and the following year the Sudan was constituted a condominium of the British and Egyptian Governments.

The northern part of the Sudan is mostly desert, with small tracts of pasture here and there; and cultivation is confined to the river (Nile) banks, for the rainfall is very scanty. Ranges of hills rise near the river to about 3,500 feet, and near Suakin there are peaks fully 5,000 feet high. South of Khartoum the tropical rains gradually increase. Kordofan, a table-land rising to 2,000 feet, the hilly Dar Nuba, and Darfur, with summits of 6,000 feet, receive a fair quantity of rain in the wet season, but at other times suffer from drought.

On the other side of the Nile, on the plains of the Atbara and the Blue Nile, very similar conditions prevail; but the soil is very fertile, and the area of cultivation might be extended by irrigation. The banks of the Bahr-el-Jebel and Bahr-el-Ghazal are low, the fall is slight and the rainfall large; and consequently the country is swampy. The latter river and its tributaries converge like a large fan from the watershed, which, running northwest from the Albert Nyanza, sinks from 6,000 feet to about 2,500 feet near Dem Ziber.

The northern part of the Sudan is occupied by Moslems of negro (Nuba) Hamitic, and Arab race, some tribes being of such mixed blood that they can not be classified. The most noted tribe of Nubians is the Dankala, or Danakil, of Dongala, to whom the Mahdi belonged; and the settled peoples of Kordofan, Darfur, and Sennar are of the same race.

The Hamities, or Bijas, include the Ababdeh, Bisharin, and Hadendoes, nomad traders celebrated for their camels. The Gararish, Hauwawir, and Jaalin are of Arab origin, as are also the Baggaras of Kordofan, the chief warriors of the Mahdi.

On the upper Nile, Sobat and Bahr-el-Ghazal dwell uncivilized negroes—the Shilluk, Nuers, Dinkas, Bongo Jurs, etc.

The capital of the Sudan is Khartoum. Other towns of importance are Omdurman (the old Dervish capital), Halfa, Merowe, Berber, El Damer, Port Sudan and Suakin.

Durra (sorghum) dokn (penicillaria) and sesame are grown in nearly all parts and yams, bananas and groundnuts (peanuts) in the south. Wheat, barley and gum from Kordofan. Cotton from Bahr-el-Ghazal, Darfur, Sennar and Kassala.

Camels, cattle, goats and sheep are the domestic animals. Gazelles roam the deserts, and the large beasts of prey are numerous; there are also crocodiles and hippopotamuses.

Railways run from Wady Halfa to Khartoum (575 miles) and from Berber to Port Sudan. A branch line from Abu Hamed to Kareima. Khartoum to Sennar, Kosti and El Obeid. The total distance covered by rail is about 2,000 miles.

Up-stream the Nile is navigable by steamers to Gondokoro (1,130 m.) but the Bahr-el-Jebel is liable to be blocked by *sudd*—masses of grass and papyrus. The Blue Nile is free to the cataracts of Roseires, about 400 miles from Khartoum; the Sobat to the boundary near Nasser, 170 miles from its mouth; and the Bahr-el-Ghazal to Meshra-el-Rek, 150 miles from Lake No.—W. T. Moffat.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

A Camping-Trip to the Flat Tops

WHERE one can sure get away by himself:

Question:—"I am considering taking a long camping-trip through the mountains in either Colorado or Wyoming and know nothing whatever of the country. Would like to have advice as to where the best places are to go to; where there aren't many people —the lonelier the better—what my equipment would cost; including a horse and pack-horse and if there would be any chance of working there.

Now, Mr. Middleton, maybe I haven't made things clear to you; but just appreciate that I am 'all ears and eyes,' and I want to know about everything in general. I am young and strong and have no dependents, so I want to get away from this hot, stuffy city.

If this is printed please use only my initials."—M. C., Indianapolis, Ind.

Answer, by Mr. Middleton:—Thanks for letting me in on planning your vacation trip for you. First I am going to make a suggestion that you do not seem to have considered.

Why have two horses? You say you are young and strong; do away with the expense of the saddle-horse and saddle and hike it from one place to another, leading a pack horse or burro, but be sure to get one that will lead well.

And here's another tip. Pick an intelligent burro, get him "camp broke," and you'll not have half the bother with him that you will with the average pack-horse. Feed him a little sugar and refuse of the cooking—they'll eat anything—and you will have to hang things up around camp to keep him out of things. Then, too, burros are a lot cheaper to start with.

Now let me recommend Trapper's Lake and the surrounding Flat Tops as the place I think you are looking for. One can surely get away by his lonely here and live close to nature. Yampa, Colo., would be your outfitting-point. As you inquire about work, I'll say this: If you should reach the Yampa country around the middle of July I have no doubt that you will find work for a short time in the hay-fields.

Next, the cost. You should be able to get a burro pack-outfit—this would be my choice—for twenty dollars: burro, pack-saddle, halter, and hobble; but you'll not need the latter after the first day or so.

A pack-horse will cost from forty to sixty dollars, and a saddle-horse possibly a little more, with the added expense of the saddle, which would not be less than twenty dollars, and a second-hand affair at that.

Yampa is distant 185 miles from Denver. Visit one of the Army stores in Denver and buy what you can there. A shelter tent will cost you about three dollars and fifty cents; a couple of wool blankets about six dollars, and I believe I'd have at least another double cotton blanket, for you will need it, I'm thinking. Then a couple of "kyacks" to pack the various camp articles—excepting bedding—in, will cost say five dollars, and a "tarp" to cover all, possibly another five dollars. Get an Army ax, camp grate and a couple of mess-pans also—oughtn't to cost more than two dollars. Might get some heavy sox there also, and if you haven't flannel shirts I'd recommend them, also canvas leggings if you wear them. I'd dress as follows: Old business or khaki suit, mackinaw or sweater, medium-weight underwear, heavy sox, flannel or khaki shirt—medium weight—stout, easy shoes and a pair of sneakers for camp, and a moderately wide-brimmed hat.

I am trying to give you a sort of a general idea; but remember this is the kind of a trip for one to wear out his old clothes on. I have failed to mention it, but be sure to take along a slicker. All of the articles I have mentioned that you don't bring with you, I'd get in Denver; the burro or horse, and a pack-saddle, in Yampa. Write Scott Teague, Yampa, Colo., if you like; he is authority on trips of this kind.

I would like to hear from you after you have made the trip or while on it. If I can help you any more, don't hesitate to come again.

Radio Antennae Nine Miles Long

THEY'RE needed to receive waves from across the Atlantic:

Question:—"Your advice as to the construction of a radio receiving-set will be greatly appreciated.

I wish to construct a three-stage radio and two-stage audio frequency receiver, using crystal detector to receive with a loop and outside antennae. I would like to say right here that I have written numbers of radio publications requesting diagram of connections and type of apparatus to use. I received the diagrams; but none of the editors would recommend any type of transformer, tuning-coil, rheostat, etc., and that is just what I want to know. Within the last three years I have purchased about five hundred dollars' worth of radio apparatus and haven't what I want yet; thus this letter to you. The set I have in mind is a universal wave receiver, and I will give you a list of the apparatus that I have purchased to construct this receiver. Apparatus to be connected as a reflex circuit.

3 UV-1714 Radio Corp. Radio Freq. Trans.
3 UV-1716 " " " " "
2 Acme AVV Audio frequency trans.
1 Federal crystal detector
5 Federal rheostats (for 201-A)
2 Federal potentiometers
Federal 3200 receivers
2 UC-1820 Faradon Variable condensers (.00004-.0006)
2 UC-1819 Faradon Mica variable cond. .0001-.005)
3 Tube sockets
Dubilier fixed condensers of all sizes
Complete set of Remler-Giblin Inductance coils
One DeForest three-coil mounting (Table)
200 feet Litzendraht wire for loop
One Federal variocoupler
One Remler "

This will give you an idea of what I have to put in this set, and I will appreciate you recommending the best type of apparatus to use, giving address of manufacturer.

I thought of using the condensers and the honeycomb coils to receive all wave lengths up to 25,000 meters with outside antennae and with loop or, if necessary, loops. I want to use loops if possible. The reason I thought of using Radio Corp. transformers is that with only six transformers I will be able to cover all wave lengths; however, if you suggest using different types of wave lengths up to 800 meters (broadcasting) that is what I will do. The idea is, I want a real set for once in my life, and I want to build it myself; and as it will cost me quite a bit I would like to have, as I stated before, a universal wave receiver.

Please give me the necessary dope on this; and as I know that it will be necessary to construct different loops to cover the long waves, I would like to have the dope as to size and capacity of condensers to use across it. I believe the R.C. 1820 condenser is so constructed that different fixed units may be shunted across it. I would also like to have the dope on the tuning inductances.

Please don't hesitate, so to speak, to junk any or all of the apparatus I have listed.

I believe that you are a radio fan, and I will be only too glad to assist you in any way as to sending you any of my stuff as token of my appreciation of your help."—W. P. Beckham, Badin, N. C.

Answer, by Mr. McNicol:—First, let me say that it is difficult to make up a set which will function satisfactorily on long waves and also on short waves. The Radio Corporation, to receive waves from 18,000 meters upward from Europe, at New York, employ antennæ nine miles long—approximately the length of the waves. When you get above 600 meters (Navy) the high-power commercial stations usually operate automatic at high speeds, the signals being unreadable, and at that are in cipher or code.

I enclose a diagram of a four-tube Reflex circuit which is a winner and one which has been found to give good satisfaction. It is the best long-distance outfit I know of. Has three stages of radio and two stages of audio frequency, as you desire.

Perhaps the UV-200 for detector and UV-201 tubes for amplifiers are best for the purpose, but 201-A may be used.

Formica, or Bakelite panel, 7 by 18 inches
Panel for base, 8 by 14 inches
4 6-ohm rheostats
4 tube sockets
3 radio frequency transformers
2 audio frequency transformers
1 variable grid leak and condenser
2 .0001 mf bypass condensers
1 .00025 mf bypass condenser
1 telephone condenser
1 telephone jack, single circuit.

The LOOP, wind flat, 14 turns spaced ⅜ inch apart, the outer turn having a diameter of 23 inches, No. 20 wire, cotton-covered or bare.

Tuning ordinarily is accomplished merely by adjusting filament rheostats and condensers—after bypass condensers are properly adjusted. If 201-A tubes are employed the bypass condensers may be omitted.

I would try the transformers you have; but if you have to procure additional units, the Paragon or United, or American Transformer Co., audio tfmrs., and Radio Service or R.C.A. radio tfmrs., are all right.

This set is not difficult to make up and is a hummer. I do not mean "hummer" in the sense that it howls. For "spill-over" adjust the direction of the loop. If oscillation is bothersome, reduce capacity of C1, C2 and C3, possibly eliminate C3.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

HERE'S a version of "John Hardy" that came in last August in response to a request. Those of you who keep the back numbers may be interested in comparing it with "John Henry" as published April 20, 1923, and with certain verses of "John Hardy" in the issue of July 10. Many readers have assured me that the two men were quite different, though the songs about them are often confused.

John Hardy

(*Text of Mr. Lee Gotcher*)

John Hardy was a desperate man,
Wore pistols night and day,
And no man dared to cross his path,
For his life he'd blow away, poor boy,
For his life he'd blow away.

John Hardy was standing by a poker game;
Not a word did he have to say,
When up stepped a man with a dollar in his hand
Said, "Let John Hardy in the game, poor boy,"
Said, "Let John Hardy in the game."

John Hardy threw down fifteen cents
Said, "A half of this I play,
And the very first man who wins my money
His life I'll blow away, poor boy,
His life I'll blow away."

Billy Heckleman won Johnny's fifteen cents;
John arose and drew his gun;
He shot Billy Heckleman through the heart
Said, "I never tell a lie to my gun, poor boy,"
Said, "I never tell a lie to my gun."

John Hardy started for the big stone gap,
But he did not get so far,
For up came a man, took Johnny by the hand
Said, "Johnny, come and go along with me, poor boy,"
Said, "Johnny, come and go along with me.

"I take you back to Shiloh town
Where the murder and the crime was done.
For the man you murdered in a poker game
It's 'Mamma, don't you know I'll be hung, poor boy,'
It's, 'Mamma, don't you know I'll be hung.' "

Johnny sent for his father and his mother to come,
For his father to go his bail.
"No bail, no bail, in the murder and the crime,"
So they shoved John Hardy back in jail, poor boy,
So they shoved John Hardy back in jail.

Oh, he's been East and he's been West—
He's been this whole world round;
He's been to the river, and he's been baptized;
Now he's ready for his hole in the ground, poor boy,
Now he's ready for his hole in the ground.

John Hardy had but one sweetheart;
The dress she wore was blue.
She went to the coffin and she raised up the lid
Said, "Johnny, I'll prove true to you, poor boy,"
Said, "Johnny, I'll prove true to you."

John Hardy now is dead and gone;
No more I care for him.
Let charity and the news ring out today
While they cover him up with the sod, poor boy,
While they cover him up with the sod.

In some versions it is the wife and not the sweetheart who promises to be true, and the song ends with the following stanza which links the story with that of John Henry, the steel-driver:

John Hardy he had but the one little girl;
Her name it was Susie Betty Ann,
And the very last words John Hardy ever said
Was, "Susie, do the best that you can,
For your papa was a steel-driving man."

THE next song I contribute myself from memory of my father's singing. Although of English origin and the work of an author rather than of the folk, it deserves notice because of its extreme popularity during pioneer days and because of the many various forms that it has taken in the course of oral transmission. In the years 1850-60, and perhaps a bit later, it was second in popularity only to Stephen Foster's "Oh, Susannah," and furnished the basis for countless local parodies. Many of these are still to be found in the paper-covered songsters of the period.

Vilikins and His Dinah

There was a rich merchant in London did dwell
Who had but one daughter, an uncommon fine gel;
Her name it was Dinah, scarce sixteen years old,
And a very large fortune in silver and gold.

Sing tural-la-lural la-lural-la-lay,
Sing tural-la-lural la-lural-la-lay,
Sing tural-la-lural la-lural-la-lay
RI-tural-la-lural la-lural-la-lay.

As Dinah was a-walking the garden one day
Her father came to her and thus he did say,
"Go dress yourself, Dinah, in gor-ge-ous array,
For you shall be married on this very day."

"Oh father, oh father," the maiden then said,
"For to be married I'm not in-cli-ned;
Oh let me stay single for a year or two more
And my very large fortune I'll gladly give o'er."

"Go, go, boldest daughter," the pa-ri-ent replied,
"If you don't consent to be this young man's bride,
I'll leave all my fortune to the nearest of kin
And you sha'n't reap the benefit of one single pin."

As Vilikins was a-walking the garden around
He spied his dear Dinah lying dead on the ground;
A cup of cold pizen it lay by her side
And a *billet dux* saying that by cold pizen she died.

With tears he lamented a thousand times o'er;
He called her his Dinah though she was no more;
So he swallered some pizen, and sang a short stave—
Now Vilikins and his Dinah lie both in one grave.

Singing, "Tural-la-lural la-lural-la-lay," etc.

AND here's a fragment. I wonder if there's any more to it—suspect not, for it sounds complete. I don't vouch for its origin; it came from Philadelphia:

I met a poor man on the Laramie Trail;
His teeth was all gone, and his face it was pale,
And he had but one ear, and his nose was caved in,
And the way that he limped was a shame and a sin.

"Oh stranger," said he, "I came to this pass
A-ticklin' the heels of a sleepin' jackass.
Look well, and take warnin' of me as you pass—
Don't tickle the heels of no sleepin' jackass."

AGAIN thanks to the many men who have sent in contributions! The whole essence of this department is cooperation, and the editor has no complaint to make on the way in which very many of you have responded. But for every one who has written in there are a hundred who have felt bashful or who have intended to write and put it off. Those are the men I'm appealing to here and now. Send in *something* before the next issue. Never mind if it's fragmentary; it will put the rest of us on the track, and some one will be able to supply what's missing. Don't worry about waiting to find a typewriter; I can read almost any handwriting except Chinese and Arabic. How about it? Let's go!

SEND all contributions of old songs and all questions about them direct to R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, California. DO NOT send them to the magazine.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

JULY 20TH ISSUE

Besides the **three complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

JUST FOR A LAUGH *W. C. Tuttle*
"*Blackie's*" temper was short—too short.

POSITION DOUBTFUL *Warren H. Miller*
The owner tried to tell the captain how to run his ship.

THE COMEBACK *Douglas Oliver*
Old "*Hardhead*" takes a recruit in hand.

PEARL-HUNGER A Five-Part Story Part III *Gordon Young*
Man overboard!

THE HOUSE OF THE BROKEN PONIARD *John Dorman*
The stranger does some gambling.

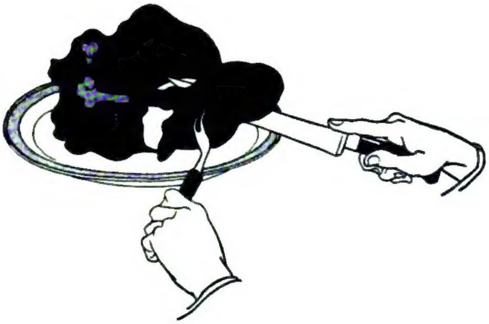
NORTHLAND TREASURE *Ruland V. E. Waltner*
The greatest thing in the world.

THE PRICE OF A HORSE *Barry Scobee*
Don't swap horses in the desert.

THE JOURNEY *F. St. Mars*
Pigmy curlews from Africa to the Arctic.

Still Farther Ahead

THE three issues following the next will contain *long stories* by Hugh Pendexter, John I. Cochrane, Frank C. Robertson, Georges Surdez, Leonard H. Nason, William Ashley Anderson, J. D. Newsom, A. D. H. Smith and Walter J. Coburn; and short stories by George E. Holt, H. Mortimer Batten, John Scarry, Barry Scobee, John Webb, Royce Brier, William Byron Mowery, W. C. Tuttle, Magruder Maury, F. St. Mars, Raymond S. Spears and others; stories of Yankee cavalrymen in the World War, squatters in the Australian cow-country, conspirators in Abyssinia, Mexican revolutionaries on the Border, hard-case skippers on the Atlantic, prospectors on the American desert, fur-hunters in Labrador, viking-farers in Norway, doughboys in the Philippines, desert riders in Morocco, prospectors in Borneo, smugglers in Chinese waters, adventurers the world around.



What sort of figure do you cut when you carve?

WHEN a crisp brown turkey or leg of lamb is placed in front of you and you sharpen the edge of your carving-knife—do you know the exact spot at which you should start to cut? Do you know where to insert the fork before you carve? Charles Faissole, maître d'hôtel of the Ambassador Hotel, New York, tells you how to carve poultry, roasts, fish, steak, legs and even roast pig in The New Butterick Cook Book.

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Uninteresting, monotonous meals served by an indifferent cook. He need no longer suffer thus. The New Butterick Cook Book contains a great variety of planned menus and delicious recipes for breakfast, dinner, supper and all special occasions — recipes that are simply explained and easy to follow. Forty different potato recipes; 50 recipes for eggs; 60 kinds of salads — this is a sample of what you find in

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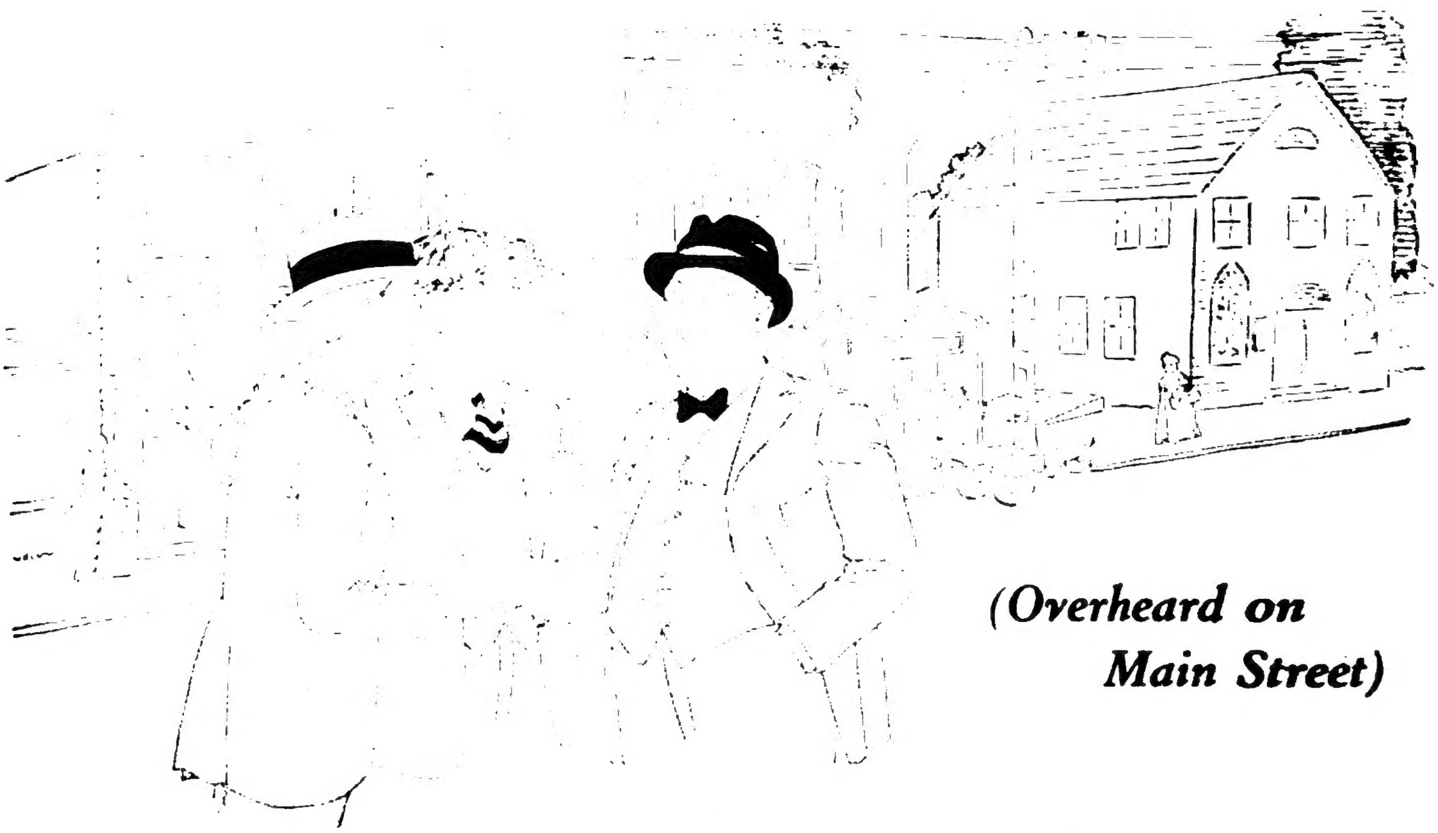

(Overheard on Main Street)

"Babbitt, meet Dr. Martin Arrowsmith"

LET Sinclair Lewis introduce you to *Dr. Martin Arrowsmith*—a very unconventional hero of a most extraordinary novel that appears serially in the current issue of *The Designer.*

This is not fiction. It is life. There is the gawky medical student at his first dance in a hired dress suit with a "come-to-heaven" collar. And the suave specialist who believes that tonsils were placed in the human organism for the express purpose of providing surgeons with closed motor cars. Or the over-sympathetic young man who finds himself engaged to two girls at once and asks a whisky bottle what to do about it. Young doctors, eager for more patients, debating the tapestry scheme of decoration for a waiting-room, as opposed to the lean and efficient look of antiseptic cleanliness.

Those who have followed Sinclair Lewis's keen analysis of all the amiable weaknesses of human nature will know what to expect. Himself a physician's son, he worked two full years to create "Dr. Martin Arrowsmith." He studied medicine with a professor of bacteriology. He traveled thousands of miles seeking local color. All that he might outdo "Babbitt" and "Main Street"—and in "Dr. Martin Arrowsmith" he has done it! Read the great new

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